THE LION AND THE FOX

Irene Owen Andrews
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BOOKS BY EIMAR O'DUFFY.

The Wasted Island	...	A novel.
Printers' Errors	...	A novel.
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THE LION AND THE FOX

BY

EIMAR O'DUFFY

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TO MY WIFE

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THE LION AND THE FOX

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A JOURNEY IS BEGUN.

Out of the shadowy depths of Coill Ultaigh, leaving its gloomy interior ways, roofed by the foliage of beech and oak, and passing through its sparse fringes of dancing birch, four young men came riding on to the plains of Leinster. Here the sun shone brightly upon a wild, bleak land: a waste of heather and bracken, with here and there a clump of stunted trees, the outposts, as it were, of the forest. Some miles away to the east was a reedy lake, and the intervening ground was boggy and covered with rushes and wild cotton. Save for the occasional whistling swoop of a snipe, the plaintive cry of a plover, or the scurry of a rabbit, the whole plain seemed empty of life.

The voices of three of the riders rang out cheerfully in this lonely waste. The fourth, a man of slight build and stature, with somewhat sharp features, a pale complexion, hair of indeterminate colour, and hard grey eyes, wearing a doublet and cloak of sober hue and simple cut, rode a short distance ahead of the others. He was older than they—well advanced in the thirties—and had matters, perhaps, to think upon which did not well consort with their gay and careless chatter. Some hundreds of yards from the forest, however, he reined in his horse—as unobtrusive an animal as its master—and waited for them to approach.

These three rode abreast. He on the right was a fine-featured man in his early twenties, brown-haired and

mustachioed; his tall figure becomingly arrayed in the fashion of an English cavalier: purple doublet richly adorned, slashed trunks, and flowing cloak; a plumed hat on his head, doe-skin riding boots on his legs, and a silver-hilted sword at his side. Equally gaily attired, though in far different fashion, was the companion on his right; who wore a linen tunic of saffron hue, and a dark and very voluminous mantle fastened at the shoulder with a silver clasp. Round his waist was a jewelled belt, from which hung a silver-mounted hunting knife. His head was bare, and he rode without stirrups. His weapon was a mighty broadsword, beside which the other's rapier seemed but a toy. Yet he was the youngest of the party: his figure had the slender grace of still uncompleted manhood; and a flaxen down covered his cheeks and chin. The yellow hair which hung to his shoulders was clipped short above a pair of blue eyes which would have looked merely gay and innocent but for the long straight nose that went with them. But there went with them also a mouth: a mouth that all women might envy and few could resist, so perfect was the shape, so rich the colour of the lips. Twice had a queen of England been deceived by such lips as these: had fancied—foolish virgin—that they were lover's lips made for no more than kissing, till she had seen them shut like a steel trap with a fierce: "I am O'Neill."

On this youngster's left rode a dark stout bearded man not far short of thirty years of age. He was clad in a leather-quilted jacket such as soldiers usually wore under their armour, leathern breeches, and a short cloak. He had a pair of pistols at his saddle-bow, and a good plain-hilted sword at his side. Though his saddle was furnished with stirrups, he seemed to disdain their use; for he kept his seat by the unaided grip of his knees, and left them dangling.

"See, O'Cahan awaits us," he said to the others, speaking, of course, in Irish. "Let us hasten forward and hear what he has to say."

The three were quickly by their leader's side. He looked them over pensively a moment and said:

"We are now arrived in Leinster, which is Queen's territory for the worst part, Queen's Irishmen's territory for the next worst, and broken Irishmen's territory for the best. Here you can trust no man, for there is no mark whereby you may distinguish friend from foe. Here Irish speech may hold a snare, an Irish sgian may seek your heart, and an Irish sparran may carry your head to Dublin Castle. Therefore be circumspect. This soil we tread is of the territory of Annaly, wherein the queen has two castles and the Queen's O'Farrells three; while the true men of the country, numbering but two hundred, hold to the woods under Ross O'Farrell, whom we have now to seek. But before we go further in our quest I have counsel and warning to give, which I pray you mark. Know then in the first place that this land of Annaly is but a stepping stone in our journey. We have a long road to travel, and a dangerous . . ." He broke off; and, turning to the young man in the saffron tunic, whose eye had kindled and whose hand had moved in the direction of his sword, he remarked: "I see that pleases you, Cormac."

"I' faith, Art," replied that youth, "your 'dangerous' is a word of little meaning in these days, when there is more danger in the life of a bard or a monk or a mercer or a herd than there used to be for a soldier in times agone. And when men of peace enjoy the very ecstasy of peril, surely it is pardonable in a soldier to smile when he is forewarned thus solemnly that his business is not a safe one."

"'Tis now your duty to make it a safe one," retorted O'Cahan, in no wise unbending. "For our present task will not be accomplished by a charge into the cannon's mouth such as I saw you deliver at Drumfluich, nor by such knightly bickerings as I hear you indulged in before Armagh. We have two hundred miles to travel . . ."

The three young men exchanged glances of surprise. O'Cahan continued his speech unperturbed.

"We have two hundred miles to travel and return; and unless we go by wasted land and trackless woods we must go by the Queen's ways and the towns and territories of

the English, among whom, Cormac, your good sword will carry you far, but a quiet appearance farther. Conn,"—here he addressed the man in the quilted jacket—"it were well to keep your feet in the stirrups even now, that you may do it the more naturally when the need arises."

"'Tis a fool's trick," grumbled Conn MacSweeny as he complied with this suggestion. "'Tis such foostering fiddle-faddle as befits an Englishman, and I take to it as a chicken to the water. Verily it unsettles my seat and mars my carriage."

The young man in the purple doublet laughed gleefully.

"You'll have no trouble in acting your part, Conn," he said. "You are the very image of an Eastcheap undertaker travelling to his estates in Desmond."

Young Cormac laughed in turn, but O'Cahan looked at him sourly, saying:

"As for you, my friend, I would that your appearance savoured somewhat less of the captain of Ulster bonnachts."

"I am not afraid to seem what I am," answered Cormac stiffly.

"'Tis a foolish answer, lad," said O'Cahan. "We have a road to travel where that dress brings certain death, and . . ."

"I fear it not."

"I do not doubt it," said O'Cahan patiently. "To doubt thy courage were to doubt thee an O'Neill. But this hair-brained folly makes me doubt thee son of Hugh."

Cormac's sword flashed in the sunlight.

"Draw, slanderer!" he shouted. "Out with your blade lest my anger spit you unarmed. Out, I say."

O'Cahan made no move except to pat the neck of his startled horse. Conn MacSweeny interposed good-humouredly, saying:

"Thou art a rare lad, Cormac. I have often seen men draw sword at the impugning of their legitimacy, but never till now for the impugning of bastardy."

Cormac turned on him hotly.

"Who calls me not Hugh's bastard," he said, "calls

me true son of Fergus, that is Queen's Irishman and cuckold husband. Therefore," and again he glared at O'Cahan, "draw thy blade and let me have at thee."

"I have no sword, boy," said O'Cahan irritably.

"Take mine then, and I will defend me with this knife."

O'Cahan laughed and said:

"Truly I am afraid; for I have such little skill with it that you would surely kill me: and what would then become of your father's messages?"

"My father's? Ha? So you recall the insult?" and the boy, who was beginning to feel foolish, sheathed his sword.

O'Cahan smiled indulgently, and said:

"Lest you feel tempted again to skewer me with that bodkin, I had best tell you what that mission is which O'Neill has entrusted to my head and your three right arms. But let us first set on, for we have yet many miles to go before dusk."

The four rode on over the rolling moorland, their horses' feet trampling its bracken and stunted heather.

"When this truce is over," resumed O'Cahan, "we fight no longer for Ulster but for Ireland—if Ireland be willing."

Conn MacSweeny snorted contemptuously.

"Willing enough," he said. "But we shall get little comfort from Ireland if the Munster men be not of better quality than the Leinster men."

"You are over-scornful in your judgment, Conn," interposed he of the purple doublet. "I was with Tyrrell in Leix last year, and found there many gentlemen of excellent spirit."

"You are right, Owen," said O'Cahan. "Nor have you spoken falsely, Conn. There are brave men and true in Leinster and Munster, but they are scattered and divided and poor in resources, and withal so broken by the Geraldine War that it is doubtful if they have either the will or the power to strike a worthy blow. And hence it is that O'Neill has sent us to take counsel with Florence MacCarthy."

"Florence MacCarthy!" cried Conn MacSweeny. "He that spends his time running between Cork and London, begging his estates of ginger-headed Lizzie?"

"The same," answered O'Cahan with a smile. "But do not judge him over harshly on that account. Men remoter from England's power than he have been compelled to put on a politic loyalty to escape destruction."

"'Tis true," Conn admitted. "And yet it is a marvel to me; for I had as lief forfeit lands and life as woo them from that sharp-nosed whore."

"Truly, Conn," laughed O'Cahan, "if Ireland is to be freed by you it is on your hand not your head she must rely. Where, think you, would our O'Neill be to-day if he had scorned to use sweet and humble words while he was building up his power? In the Tower of London, if indeed this planet held him at all; and a Queen's O'Neill would be lording it in Dungannon."

"I have no answer for you," said Conn. "I am but a simple man, and these ways are beyond my comprehension."

"But what of the concernancy, sir?" asked Cormac of O'Cahan.

"'Tis no more than I have said. I go south with full powers to treat for an alliance with MacCarthy, who is the man of most account among the Irish of Munster, being Tanist to MacCarthy Reagh, and having hopes since the death of his father-in-law of becoming MacCarthy Mór. On his answer depends the aim of O'Neill's next campaign. The care of the negotiations is entrusted to me and the care of me to you, who, O'Neill has assured me, are the three best swordsmen in his army."

"Then there will be blows before we are finished?" cried Cormac eagerly.

"Not if we can avoid them," answered O'Cahan. "For our whole expedition comes to naught if we meet with any mishap. But take heart! There will be blows enough and to spare when we are returned and the truce is ended. Nay, I would venture to say that Drumfluich and Clontibret were but as skirmishes to the battle that is before us."

"And it may be," suggested Cormac, "I say it *may* be that our swords shall have work to do even on this journey?"

"Even so. But carry them warily as if for mere ornament, as Owen carries his, or as if they were little to your liking but salutary in a dangerous land, as I carry this dagger: not so that the timorous can see that they are ever ready to leap from the scabbard like yours. For we must pass through most of the land looking like men of peace, and if we have need to enter a town it were well that we looked like Englishmen. Therefore we must seek you a plain doublet and hose like mine, and a pair of stirrups; and it were well if you exercised yourself in the use of their language."

"Their language!" cried Cormac. "Why, I know no word of it. Never could I twist my mouth to such discordant sounds. If I am to pass as English it must be as one who has fallen from civilitie from residence among the mere Irish."

"Though thou hast a feather brain," said O'Cahan, "thou hast a ready wit. May it serve thee instead!"

He fell into a silence after that; and the other three dropped behind him, conversing on lighter matters as before. They rode for nearly an hour, with the sun sinking in mellow radiance on their right; while a melancholy mood, fitting to the time, settled upon the young man called Owen, who, after taking an ever diminishing part in the conversation, finally dropped out of it altogether.

Cormac, getting no answer to some remark, rallied him humorously, but elicited only an abstracted smile, whereat he turned to Conn, saying:

"If he is not still thinking of that English maid that won his heart two years ago!"

Owen blushed at the impeachment.

"I knew it!" said Cormac. "Never did Cupid's shaft wound so barbarously before. What, man! wounded so long ago and bleeding yet? Has the elixir of battle proved no better medicine than the cobwebs of peace?"

"Thou art but a boy, Cormac," answered Owen toler-

antly, "and knowest nothing of love. Cease thy prate and leave me to my thoughts."

"O evil are the effects of going a-fostering among the English!" cried Cormac. "Look you, Conn. This, that was a doughty blade and a good hunter and a jolly gamester and a delight to all women, is, with reading love-born poetry and tales of faithful love, so run to sighs and yearning and sweet imaginings that men's company pleases him no more, nor women's neither, save the one; his sword is nothing but the cross whereon he swears his lovers' vows, and his whole ambition is shrunk to the longing to be a husband."

"Thou foolish boy!" said Owen. "Some day Love shall avenge these slights you have cast upon him. He always smites hardest those who have flouted him."

Cormac laughed loudly.

"He has smote me many a time," he said. "Think not that I am cold; I were no true man if I were such. I have loved hotly and often, and hotly and often shall I love again. But to be married: to sign me over body and soul to one woman and foreswear all others; to be numbered among the old men and lose my place in the front line of battle—no, by my hilt, not I. Let bastard beget bastard, and take his love where he finds it."

"Ah, Cormac!" said Owen. "Such is not the way to true happiness."

"Happiness! Pah! Give me a good horse and a good sword and I'll foreswear happiness. What say you, Conn?"

"Nay," said Conn. "I'm not philosophical. Too much thinking makes my head ache, and that it sours the heart" —with a jerk of his thumb at O'Cahan—"we have good evidence . . . But why pauses he again?"

Pricking up their steeds they soon found an answer to his question. A truly ghastly sight had caused O'Cahan to rein in his horse. Within a small cultivated patch on the very edge of the moorland stood the charred and shattered gable ends of a cottage. Beside it grew a fine beech tree, two of whose branches bent under a burden only too obvious even from the distance. Cormac saw

that O'Cahan's face was pale and angry. O'Cahan said nothing, but urged on his steed. The others followed, and in a few minutes they dismounted before the ruin.

The naked bodies of a man and woman hung by the neck from the beech tree; and the young men could see that they had been savagely maltreated before being done to death. A cold rage took possession of each at the sight —rage that makes the heart so sick that it pauses in its action: rage too awful to find any expression: the sane and terrible anger known only to the men of oppressed nations. No word was said until a sudden cry came from Owen.

"Look there!"

In a clump of nettles lay the corpse of an infant. Conn MacSweeney pulled it forth. It had been transfixed by a sword.

"Good God!" was the sole exclamation uttered by anyone.

Conn MacSweeney cut down the two bodies. The man must have been something over fifty years of age, the woman something below it.

"These cannot be dead more than a day," said O'Cahan after examining them.

"Then," said Cormac in fierce exultation, "the murderers must be within reach of our vengeance."

But O'Cahan had already mastered his passion; only a slight tremor of the hands told of its ever having risen.

"Ours is another task," he said, "and a greater." Then, seeing chagrin and disappointment in the lad's face, he added: "If we were to hunt out and punish every murderer that fights for the queen we should be occupied till Doomsday. Ireland is to be freed, boy, and then there shall be a mighty reckoning."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH A PHILOSOPHER IS FOUND IN THE WILDERNESS, AND SOMETHING IS LEARNT OF FLORENCE MACCARTHY.

The sun went down as the travellers remounted their horses. They had covered the bodies with mould and branches, having neither the time nor the instruments to bury them; and they now pressed on in order to reach their destination before nightfall. But they had not ridden more than half a mile when they were again brought to a stop by yet another horror. Right in their track a heap of slain bodies marked the site of what had evidently been a small battle: for some were riddled with bullets, some pierced with pikes, and some hacked with sword cuts. The issue of the fight, also, was evident, for the bodies were all Irish. They lay where they fell, with their weapons about them.

"The murderers are more than we could punish," observed O'Cahan to Cormac as he gave the order to advance.

In the gathering darkness they rode on for another twenty minutes till a dense wood loomed before them. This O'Cahan pronounced to be their destination. They had some difficulty in finding an opening in the undergrowth, but they succeeded at last. It proved to be the entry to a narrow track, down which they advanced cautiously in single file, leading their horses. Deeper and deeper they went, and darker and darker grew the way; but there was no mistaking the track, for, though it took a serpentine course, the undergrowth formed an impenetrable wall on each side.

Suddenly Conn MacSweeney, who was in front, saw the glimmer of lights far ahead among the trees, and at the same instant a voice cried in Irish :

" Halt ! Who goes there ?"

" Friends," answered Conn.

" Armed ?" asked the voice.

" Yes."

" How many are ye ?"

" Four."

" Then let one advance unarmed and with his hands above his head."

Conn would have obeyed this order, but O'Cahan motioned him back, and walked forward himself till he came in view of two shadowed figures carrying muskets, when he halted and said :

" I have business with your chief. Go to him, one of you, and say : ' Clontibret is the word.' that he may know who I am ; and ask him for a countersign that I may know who he is."

One of the sentries departed, and was absent about a quarter of an hour. When he returned he was accompanied by another man, who said to O'Cahan :

" O'Neill is the man."

" 'Tis well," said O'Cahan, and signalled his companions forward, saying that these were Ross O'Farrell's men.

" Ross O'Farrell bids you welcome," said the messenger, " and has sent me to lead you to his camp."

He turned forthwith and marched ahead, leaving them to follow. The path wound on in the same fashion as before, except that here and there it gave off a branch or was crossed by other tracks. Presently the trees thinned out and the light in front became clearer ; then a sudden curve brought them out on to a large open space with an immense fire burning in the middle of it, round which sprawled or sat some scores of armed men. Its light, aided by that of some flaring torches fixed to the tops of four pine trees that had been shorn of their crests, revealed also that the glade, which was of considerable

extent, was dotted over with numerous wicker or log huts and a few canvas tents.

One isolated tent was situated a short distance from the path down which they had come, fulfilling some of the purposes of the guard-tent of a regular encampment. Here they handed over their horses to a man on duty, and then followed their guide through the scattered groups of loungers to a large tent some distance away. Most of the guerillas paid them but little attention. Some were asleep, some conversing in groups, some mending their weapons, a few even reading by the firelight. One or two questioned the guide, but were answered curtly or disregarded.

At length our friends reached the tent, and the guide, raising the curtain, requested them to enter. Within two men were seated at a powder-keg, playing chess by the light of a lantern hung from the cross pole. They rose to their feet immediately, and the nearer, a youth of twenty, gave a glad cry of recognition at sight of Conn MacSweeney.

"What ho! old comrade," he said. "Right glad am I to see you again. Ross, this is Conn MacSweeney who fought by my side at Mullingar last year."

The other man bowed jerkily and stammered some confused words of welcome. Cormac and Owen stared at him in amazement, one question flashing simultaneously through the minds of both. Could this—this puny creature, not five feet eight in height, with his prematurely thinning hair, his soft white hands, his shoulders studiously stooped, and his mild blue eyes blinking behind a pair of horn spectacles—could this be the man who with a handful of followers had maintained his independence in Leinster for over two years?

But it was, as they learned at once when his more attractive-looking comrade introduced them.

Two years ago Ross O'Farrell, son and heir to O'Farrell Bane, chief of one of the great houses into which the clan was divided, had been a bookish country gentleman with little more than an artistic interest in politics and war. The territory of Annaly had up till then played little part in the history of the country. Far away in the

extreme north-west of Leinster, holding no strategic points and crossed by no strategic routes, it had been fortunate in avoiding the conqueror's particular attention. Happy inglorious Annaly! Such fortune could not last for ever. Greedy eyes coveted those stately forests, those rich defenceless plains. Younger sons of planters in neighbouring Westmeath, needy adventurers in the Pale and in England—how they longed to become great territorial lords! How they watched for the slightest symptom of "disloyalty" which should be the signal for their vulture swoop. But in vain. Shame on these caitiff O'Farrels! If they are ever to be uprooted from those domains they must be *made* rebel. So on the first stirrings of O'Neill in the North my lord of Delvin sallies forth from his Castle of Killean at the head of five hundred of her Majesty's troops and does a great hosting into Annaly, burning and destroying, and killing half a dozen gentlemen, besides divers others of the meaner sort (who in the spacious days of good Queen Bess were apparently not worth the trouble of counting).

But the great lords, O'Farrell Buidhe and O'Farrell Bane, were not to be driven into rebellion so easily. They shut themselves up in their castles (impregnable except to an army) and, when the raider had withdrawn, contented themselves with sending remonstrances to Dublin Castle, which were duly docketed and "marked read," possibly at the self-same council meeting to which my lord of Delvin sent the bleeding heads of three of their cousins in report of his exploit.

The sons of these chiefs, however, were made of sterner stuff. Ross, son of O'Farrell Bane, had been in Dublin negotiating for the publication of his tract entitled *Enquiries into the Platonic Doctrine of Patriotism* when the raid took place, and returned a week later to find his house in ruins, his servants butchered or fled in panic to the woods, and the manlier part of the clansmen crying out against the passivity of their chief and looking for a leader to organise a defence for the future. Ross was a man of peace and unambitious, but the clansmen looked to him as their natural lord, and, moreover, he had at

one time made a special study of the campaigns of Vercingetorix in Gaul; so diffidently, but not altogether hopelessly, he organised a force of a hundred spearmen and archers and twenty musketeers. By skilful manœuvring he succeeded in trapping my lord of Delvin (out for a second prey of heads) into a miniature Caudine Forks. My lord himself and a handful of cavaliers gallantly cut their way out, leaving the rest of the force to surrender at discretion. Wiser than Caius Pontius, and knowing by uncountable precedents that they would do as much for him, had they the chance, Ross put them all to death.

But neither this exploit, nor O'Neill's victory at Drumfluich, could stir those tame O'Farrells to action, and the bulk of the clansmen preferred to imitate their chiefs. So Ross and his handful of followers had to betake themselves to the woods, where presently they were joined by young Rory, son of O'Farrell Buidhe, at the head of a similarly venturesome band. Their united forces barely reached two hundred men, but Ross discovered in himself capabilities of which a month before he had never dreamed; so that from thenceforth none of her Majesty's plunderers dared show themselves in Annaly save in overwhelming numbers, and even then they paid for it dearly. In due course Ross made alliance with O'Neill, who thereby gained an outpost in Leinster, and perhaps also his first realisation of the pan-Hibernian idea.

Such a career seemed indeed unsuited to the quiet little man standing by the chess-board.

"Why, he's no bigger than an Englishman," said Cormac to himself.

O'Cahan, however, was old enough to have learnt not to judge by appearances. He duly presented his credentials and waited for O'Farrell to speak.

"You come straight from O'Neill?" asked the latter when he had read them.

"Yes. Forty miles and more have we ridden this day."

"Then I have not been unwise in ordering supper for you?" suggested the guerilla nervously.

"By the gnawing of my vitals, no!" exclaimed Conn; and even as he spoke a huge venison pasty was brought

in and set upon a table quickly constructed out of planks and trestles.

"The service is rough, I fear," Ross apologised.

"Nay," said Conn; "such a pasty as this needs no garnishing. Verily I have never tasted the like."

"Indeed I marvel," said Owen, "to find such cookery in the wilds. The kitchens of the King of Spain could not better it."

"It was my fortune," said Ross, "to meet with a most excellent cook some years ago in Dublin— a Fleming in the employment of one of the Lords Justices. I found him in a most miserable condition, having been dismissed from his position for the utterance of sentiments unfavourable to the government of small nations by large ones. I engaged him straightway, and the faithful fellow has not hesitated to remain with me even in the uncomfortable and perilous life which has been thrust upon me. . . . Rory, draw some beer, I pray you. 'Tis all the liquor I can offer you, gentlemen. My wines all perished with my house."

As soon as his first hunger was satisfied O'Cahan began to tell his host about the grim discovery they had made on their journey, but O'Farrell interrupted, saying:

"That was the mark of the foul hand of my lord of Delvin and his cut-throat crew, who, spite of the truce, in reliance on which our poor churls had made some start at tilling their lands, burst yesterday into our territories with fire and sword. A black and reeking course he made, sweeping from south to west, from Ardagh to Athleague, and from Athleague to the very borders of Breffni, leaving naught but slaughtered beasts and men, and ruined crops and houses behind him. There, as he headed eastward, we overtook him. I, with our main force, made a wide sweep to the west to take him in rear, whilst Rory with a smaller body lay in wait in the fringes of the wood on his flank. So had we them completely at our mercy, but that their own cruelty saved them; for, as they marched along unconscious of their danger, they came to the house of one Fiach, father of two young men in our following, and, laying hands on him and his wife, grossly

maltreated them; whereat Rory and his men could no longer contain themselves, but breaking from cover assailed them furiously.

"'Twas a noble fight," cried the little man, his mild eye lighting up at his imagination of it. "See, strangers, here were the four hundred Gall, intent on nothing but their savage sport. They hear a shout. The forty Gael are upon them, are among them, are fetching red fountains out of their ripped throats and bosoms. Right through their midst young Rory hews his way, shaking great circles with his blood-slavered blade. . . ."

"I did not," interrupted Rory. "I had two pistols that wouldn't go off, so I had to do the best I could with the butts. We killed half a dozen of them for all that ere they drove us back to the woods."

"And so they saved themselves," resumed Ross. "For when we came upon the scene they were ready for us, and outnumbering us also, they drove us from the field; howbeit not so tumultuously but we killed a few of them and took away two prisoners."

"'Twas indeed a worthy fight!" cried Cormac. "O had we but started a day sooner!"

O'Farrel smiled and said:

"Nay, 'twould have availed little. . . . You see, O'Cahan, we can barely hold our own here. All our hope is in O'Neill. Does he meditate such a stroke as will drive these menaces from our borders?"

"He does," replied O'Cahan. "And it is for the preparation of that stroke that I and my comrades journey south. More than that I cannot say, for his plans are not yet ripe."

"I hope that his contemplations spread beyond his own borders and take in the full circuit of this island. It has seemed to me till now that he would willingly forego all advantage for the south so that he might keep his own territories secure."

"I think you will find that his ultimate intentions are of wider scope," said O'Cahan.

"Heaven incline him so. But I would that my treatise on the *Platonic Theory of Citizenship* were printed that I

might send him a copy to digest. Is he philosophical-minded?"

"No. His life has been too much occupied with intrigues and battles to leave him much time for reading."

"'Tis a pity. There is more in books than your man of action dreams of. In books I learned many of those devices whereby I scared and baffled Delvin and his myrmidons. . . . Another slice of pasty, sir? You will do my cook an injustice if you do not finish it."

But finish it they did, and washed it down with draughts of good brown ale.

Conn then declared he was drowsy, and Cormac and Owen were already almost asleep. Rory accordingly took them off to see to their bestowal for the night, so that Ross and O'Cahan were left alone.

"I have no mistrust of Rory," said O'Cahan then. "But I have things to say to you which it is O'Neill's order are for your ear alone in Annaly. Know then that your wish shall be fulfilled, and that when the truce is over O'Neill strikes for Ireland."

"I more than suspected it," cried Ross; "and it does my heart good to hear it."

"For the furtherance of this aim," continued O'Cahan, "we travel south to seek allies. Now the man in Munster in whom O'Neill has the highest hopes is Florence MacCarthy, whom I have never met, but whom I have heard very variously spoken of; and I would like to hear better report of him before I entrusted our full secret to his keeping. Do you know him?"

"I have met him some half-dozen times in Dublin."

"Do you think him trustworthy?"

"Nay, that question cannot be answered with a word; nor will a word suffice to describe Florence MacCarthy, about whom there are as many different opinions as there are men that know him. And verily I believe that Florence is not one but fifty men. For he is a courtier at Windsor, an Irish chieftain in Munster, a very lawyer in the law courts, and the cynosure of all eyes everywhere. Besides which he is soldier and statesman, poet and scholar, and has been the hero of a love story that shall

take its place in the chronicles alongside that of Hero and Leander, Tristan and Isolde, or whomsoever you will. Then, added to all his other qualities, he has a charm and sweetness of manner that wield a subtle influence over all he meets; so that, whether they trust him or doubt him, they cannot choose but love him. The English mistrust him for a rebel; the Irish believe him in league with the English; yet he is high in favour with Queen Elizabeth, sworn brother to Sir Thomas Norreys, and the very idol of the people of Munster. Still, by his address and cunning, he commits himself irrevocably to neither; though whether this is for the better holding of Munster by the Queen, or for the better plotting its liberation, or merely for the sake of peace, I cannot tell."

"Why, 'tis a very Machiavelli," said O'Cahan. "Still, I doubt not that I shall sift him. His fortune is near spent in law suits for the retention of his own property against the undertakers; so for that, if for no other reason, he should be glad to see the English expelled from Munster."

"Well, let us hope so," said Ross, and with that they parted for the night.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH CORMAC O'NEILL GETS A NEW SUIT OF CLOTHES, AND THE JOURNEY IS CONTINUED.

Next morning, well provisioned by Ross O'Farrell, the four Ulstermen resumed their journey. Guided by Rory they traversed the remaining four miles of the forest by just such a track as that by which they had entered it, and at length emerged at a point where it skirted a narrow road running southwards. Here Rory bade them farewell.

"A mile down this road," he said, "lie her Majesty's town and castle of Longford. There you may purchase such sober weeds as will enable our friend Cormac to complete his journey with a sound skin. You, Cormac, had better avoid the town. There is an unfrequented path to the east which leads to a thicket close to the road beyond it. There you may hide till the others rejoin you."

The Ulstermen thanked him and rode on. But they had gone barely a hundred yards when he hailed them loudly.

"Best get a scissors, too," he shouted, as they turned inquiringly; and with a wave of his hand he re-entered the forest.

"Now what meant he by that?" asked Cormac as they trotted down the road.

Conn MacSweeney gave forth a horse-laugh.

"That was sentence of death on those locks of yours," he said. "'Twill be the breaking of many a heart in Ulster."

Cormac flushed angrily. He was decidedly vain of those yellow curls of his, which had indeed played no small part in his success with women.

"A truce to your fooling, Conn," he said. "To doff my natural garb is trial enough, but to doff a part of myself—'tis too much. And 'tis unnecessary too, for if every long-haired man in Ireland were a soldier to O'Neill, Queen Elizabeth's dominions were shorn of an island."

They rode on till they found the laneway of which Rory had spoken, and here Cormac prepared to part from the others. Conn, however, whose English was of meagre quality, elected to accompany him.

"'Tis well," said O'Cahan to Owen as they made for the town. "Conn has a cool head, and will keep the lad out of mischief."

Longford was a sleepy little market town with a mixed population of Irish and English. It was unfortified, relying for its defence on the proximity of the castle. This had been captured by O'Donnell in his great raid three years ago, and partially demolished, but soon afterwards had been repaired and re-garrisoned. The garrison, however, was a weak one and kept within its walls, so that O'Cahan and his companion met with neither questioning nor hindrance during their short sojourn in the town. In any case the appearance of the two young men was unimpeachable. Owen, who had spent all his youth in England—having been intended for a Queen's O'Ruaire—might have passed anywhere for an Englishman. O'Cahan might have been a Palesman, or indeed anything but a follower of O'Neill. So with absolute coolness and assurance they rode leisurely down the main street, and, having given their horses to a lounger to hold, entered a clothier's shop and bought a fashionable suit and other equipment for Cormac. Then, after stopping at a sadler's for a pair of stirrups, they left the town as innocently as they had entered it.

They soon found the thicket described by Rory, where their comrades awaited them; and here Cormac changed into his new clothes. The light grey doublet, the trunks, with their slashings to reveal the purple lining, the short

riding-cloak, and the white-plumed hat, all became him well, as he grudgingly admitted.

"But these stirrups!" he cried disparagingly. "What weak-kneed, leaden-footed creature ever invented them? And how can a horseman like me ever tame himself to the use of them? Verily you must clip the wings of my heels ere you can get me to think of climbing into the saddle by such shifts as these." And with that he leapt on his horse without touching them.

"For the last time," he said apologetically, seeing a look of disapproval on O'Cahan's face.

"Put your feet into them," commanded the latter.

Cormac obeyed, and they resumed their journey. In a short time they fell in once more with the trail of the Lord of Delvin, searing like a black scar the smiling face of the land of Annaly. For four miles their road led through a region of burnt and shattered cottages, ravaged crops, and slaughtered beasts and men; a narrow strip of desolation, which presently swung away to the east, pointing to the lair whence the wolves had issued.

It was now past mid-day, so the party dismounted by the side of a tiny stream, and made a hearty meal off the bread and cold venison and beer that Ross O'Farrell had provided.

"Three miles more," said O'Cahan, "brings us to the border of Westmeath, which is held down for the Queen by many castles which Tyrrell, in spite of his victory last year, has been unable to take. Tyrrell is encamped somewhere by the shores of Lough Ennel, and thither must we make our way this night, for it is the only friendly spot in the country, and I have despatches to deliver from O'Neill."

So presently they rode on, and, taking a detour to avoid the lands and castle of one Fergus O'Farrell—who was a staunch upholder of the English, and had testified to his loyalty by sending the heads of three suspect kinsmen to Dublin Castle that very spring—they finally reached the small stream that divides Annaly from Westmeath. They now turned in a south-easterly direction, and giving a wide berth to two frowning castles that stood in their way,

came at length to the wild marshy region that surrounds Lough Ennel. They could see the lake itself in the distance, glinting under the rays of the setting sun, and jogged wearily towards it for another hour. Then, as the last of the evening light faded out of the sky, they heard a welcome challenge in an unmistakable Ulster voice.

They had blundered into a mounted patrol of Tyrrel's men. The travellers were readily identified, for O'Cahan and Cormac were known by sight to every soldier in O'Neill's army; and it happened that this particular patrol was composed of O'Cahan's clansmen. One man was at once detached from the patrol as escort, and in ten minutes brought them to the camp.

As they came into the circle of light spread by the camp fires they were instantly recognised, and old friends came thronging round them clamouring for news from Ulster. "Is the war to go on?" "Have the English given in?" "Has Portmore fallen?" "How fares my wife?" These and a hundred similar questions the travellers had to answer as well as they could, while their escort elbowed a way to Tyrrell's tent. They reached it at last, however, and on entering found the general and his second-in-command, Dermot O'Connor, in hot argument over a map.

The victor of Tyrrell's Pass was a harsh-looking, plain-featured man with wiry reddish hair and brusque manners. Quick-witted, resourceful, fearless, energetic, of iron frame and stoic spirit, he was the born captain of bonnachts. A mercenary soldier, yet of unswerving loyalty; English by origin, yet a stauncher son to his adopted country than many of her own; he was O'Neill's right-hand man. The battle in the pass which has ever since borne his name had won many districts of Leinster to the national cause, notably in Leix and Offaly, where it had partly undone the previous work of expropriation. Ever since that day he had maintained himself, with his little force of eight hundred trained Ulstermen, in Westmeath and Leix, drilling and stiffening the Leinster levies and occasionally storming hostile castles and strongholds, until his activities had been stayed by the truce.

O'Connor was a man of very different stamp. Vigorous and resourceful like Tyrrell, brave and enduring like Tyrrell, he lacked that leader's steadier qualities. His courage was of a rasher sort, bursting in battle into a kind of Berserker fury, in which ecstatic condition he would fling all the cares of leadership to the winds to perform prodigies of valour in the thickest of the slaughter. At Tyrrell's Pass, for instance, he had plied his sword so vigorously that his hand swelled within the guard, and had to be extricated after the battle by the aid of a file. He was a short-tempered choleric man, vain and ambitious. He had restless, distrustful eyes, a full and rather credulous mouth, and the highly-coloured complexion that marks those of his temperament. His voice, ordinarily high-pitched, had a tendency, when its owner was excited or thwarted, to rise almost to a scream; and it was in a moment of such vociferation that the entry of O'Cahan and the others interrupted him.

He broke off at once—he was astonishingly volatile—and uttered an exclamation of glad surprise. Tyrrell, too, came forward with greetings, and despatched their escort to order supper.

"And what news from Ulster?" he asked as soon as all were seated.

"I have despatches for you here," said O'Cahan, taking from his wallet a sealed packet and passing it across the table. "But the gist of it is that when the truce ends the fighting begins again. It is now certain that the Queen will refuse O'Neill's terms, and we are informed that two thousand fresh troops and much artillery and stores have been landed in Dublin. O'Neill intends to make yet another assault on Portmore, and hopes to lead the enemy into a battle on that ground. He expects you to take the field at the same time, and would have report of your strength."

"I have a considerable force of good hopeful men," replied Tyrrell. "Besides my eight hundred Ulstermen I can muster near twelve hundred foot and two hundred horse of the men of Leix, Offaly and Westmeath, and we would have twice as many if the chieftains would only

compose their differences and cease quarrelling over what will go to none of them if we lose the war. Then by no means can we win over O'Carroll to join us, for he is so attached to the Queen's government, whether for favours past or to come I know not, that he recently put to death a hundred Ulster bonnachts that were in his service. And so all Ely, which can make five hundred good fighting men, is lost to us."

"The good men of Ely would throw him over readily enough if you would but do what I ask you," said O'Connor. "Look you, O'Cahan"—here he directed attention to the map—"those two castles, which are all the Queen possesses in Ely, I have this day learnt are but poorly defended and their walls in bad repair. Besides which the garrison holds most negligent ward, so that a shrewd attack these dark nights should deliver them into our hands. Then would Ely be free to join us."

"Peace!" said Tyrrell. "There is a truce declared."

O'Connor sneered.

"A truce indeed," he cried. "When have the English ever kept faith with us that we should scruple to break it with them? Why this very truce which you cherish so tenderly they have already broken by attacking Brian O'Moore at Ikerrin on Easter Eve. Faith, I think that the people who invented the proverb, 'All's fair in war,' should taste something of its meaning."

"Chatterer!" said Tyrrell. "Had you but a curb to that tongue of yours you would have given me chance to say that it is not merely from a nice sense of honour towards scoundrels that I refuse to break the truce, but from a knowledge that when a truce is broken once it is broken everywhere; and how would it please O'Neill if we gave the enemy the excuse to attack him before his preparations are complete?"

This silenced O'Connor, who retired in very ill humour from the conversation.

"You see what our situation is?" said Tyrrell to O'Cahan. "Still I doubt not that with what forces we have we may deal such bold strokes as opportunity shall place in our way. O'Neill may feel sure that any army

marching north will not do so without receiving some slight annoyance from us."

Soon after this supper appeared, and as soon as they had despatched it the weary travellers retired to bed.

Tyrrell, left alone, broke the seal of his despatches. What he read there caused him to smite his thigh—the most exuberant gesture ever affected by that taciturn bonnacht.

Next morning our friends resumed their journey. Half an hour's ride brought them into Offaly, a country, according to the English, of "wicked and rebellious people" —in other words, of people who had offered an unusually stiff resistance to English aggression. By Tyrrell's help that resistance had now developed into a vigorous offensive, and the English had all been expelled from the country except for a few who held out in one strong castle. So it was through a friendly land that the comrades journeyed that day. Signs of war were infrequent too, for the reconquest had been swift enough to be accomplished without devastation. By evening they had left Offaly behind them, and were speeding through Leix to the house of Owny MacRory O'More in the district of Gallyn.

The son of the great guerilla chief now dwelt in a fine Elizabethan mansion built on his ancestral property by the Undertaker to whom it had been allotted, and who had fled with all speed when Tyrrell's victory, coupled with O'More's minor success at Stradbally Bridge, had made the country untenable for the English. A saffron-kilted clansman established in the gate-lodge admitted the travellers to the demesne, and conducted them up the avenue to the house. Another clansman opened the hall door and showed them into what must have been, at least to the untravelled Conn and Cormac, the most astonishing-looking room conceivable—a room furnished in the pretentious, inharmonious, unimaginative, trivial and utterly uncomfortable style dear to the English middle-classes in every generation.

It would have been hard to find a more inappropriate setting for the terrible chieftain, who soon appeared to

welcome his guests. Owny O'More was a young man, under thirty, but there was nothing of youth in his preternaturally stern countenance, or in the fierce brown eyes that burned in the depths of their high-boned sockets—eyes that held but one memory and one purpose. For this man had been born to vengeance, lived for vengeance, had drunk deep of vengeance, would yet drink deeper, and was destined to die before ever his thirst was assuaged.

Twenty years ago Sir Francis Cosby, English Governor of Leix, had devised a plan, not too novel in the history of this island, to bring that territory into thorough subjection. He invited all the native nobility and gentry, Owny's grandfather among them, to a great banquet at Mullaghmast. Thither they went, all unsuspecting, in number about four hundred, and while they caroused soldiers were loosed on them, who slew them all. Owny's father had waged a desperate war of vengeance on the murderers, until finally he was taken, along with his wife, and put to death. Then Owny in his turn had taken up the quarrel, and, even before O'Neill's revolt, had been known to the English settlers as "a lewd and bloody rebel" whose hand was heavy on all their kind.

He showed even more unbounded joy than O'Farrell and Tyrrell at the news from Ulster.

"'Twas ill done to make any truce at all with the slippery Saxon," he grumbled. "Here had we Portleise almost taken when the cessation was proclaimed. Now we shall have all our work to do again, and doubly difficult it will be, for they have strengthened and re-victualled the place during our idleness."

"You shall have your teeth in it again, young wardog," said O'Cahan.

"I warrant you, for there's a Cosby in it," said Owny, his eyes blazing at mention of the name. "And where there's a Cosby nor wall nor ditch can withstand O'More."

"You shall have a thousand Ulster bonnachts to make sure of it," said O'Cahan, who disliked heroics.

"I thank you," said O'More. "But the swords of my own people will suffice."

" None the less you shall have our help," said O'Cahan, " for, Cosby or no Cosby, the place is important and must be taken at all costs."

" My sword, I warrant, can fetch a Cosby out of whatever mouse-hole he may skulk in. Nay, if he trench him in the frozen zones of ice, or in the inky depths of Ethiopia, or take refuge within the seven gates of hell itself, I'll hale him forth and send his mince to Liza's table."

" But how many men can you muster against Portleise?" inquired O'Cahan, still intent on the practical issue.

" Now that I have won back all the territory of the clan I can put five hundred stout footmen and thirty horse in the field."

" Do you not know that the garrison of Portleise is double that number?" said O'Cahan. " And shall you not also have to deal with MacGilla Patrick?"

" Ay, that traitorous Saxon-loving beast! Without his help my father had never been slain. Those men of Ossory have ever been fiercer foes to the O'Mores than the English themselves."

" Then you will not find our thousand bonnachts much amiss," said O'Cahan. " And now," he added, " since we must resume our journey southwards to-morrow I would learn of you the easiest route."

" 'Tis a hard question," said Owny. " For Ely is Queen's Irish, Ossory is the same, and Ormond is English shire ground; yet through one or other your road must lie." He pondered a moment and resumed : " Since you have assumed so English a guise I think you had best go through Ormond, for your traitor Irishman is ever readier to seek head-money than your mere Englishman. Moreover, 'tis the shortest and straightest route, and you shall find good inns at Thurles and Cashel."

" Then Ormond shall it be," said the Ulstermen.

They stayed with Owny that night, and next mid-day found them well within the borders of Munster. They dined at Thurles, supped and slept at Cashel, and next morning entered the country of Desmond.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH A SWEET POET TALKS BITTER PROSE, AND MORE IS HEARD ABOUT FLORENCE MACCARTHY.

They were now in the territory which had borne the fearful ordeal of the Geraldine war fifteen years before—a war conducted with a savagery almost unparalleled in the history of the world. The method of conquest (we have it coolly set down first as a proposition, then as a description of an accomplished fact, by the English authorities themselves) was the simple one of extirpation of the population—by the sword; by famine, induced by wholesale devastation; but particularly by the systematic destruction of infants and children.

The country still bore traces of that terrible time. The four Ulstermen passed through many large areas absolutely desolate of man or beast, where the only signs of the life that had been were the shattered wrecks of houses, overgrown with wild and rank vegetation. But even in the districts that had suffered less or had since recovered the marks of the struggle were still apparent—in the blackened wrecks of forests, in the ruined villages that lay beside the new ones, in the poverty and disease of the surviving people.

In many of the villages, too, their ears were offended by that strange harsh jargon—the English language; for in Munster alone of the provinces, owing to the extermination aforesaid, the new settlers had escaped Hibernicisation. It made Cormac rave to see these bovine creatures in their placid, self-complacent industry reap-

ing the rich fruits of the land of the Gael without one thought of the epic and the tragedy that had been enacted before it had passed into their hands.

On the evening of the second day after leaving Cashel, the party came to a rich, densely-wooded, well-watered and carefully tended demesne.

"This," said O'Cahan, "is the estate of Kilcolman. Who, think you, dwells here?"

"Some Undertaker, surely," said Cormac; "for such rich lands were never left to a mere Irishman."

"Yes, he is an undertaker; but he is also a poet, and his name is Edmund Spenser."

"Edmund Spenser!" cried Owen O'Ruairc. "Why, 'tis an old acquaintance of mine. I met him years ago in London when I was in her Majesty's favour. Let us pay him a visit."

"I'll hob-nob with no damned Englishman," growled Conn.

"Nor I," said Cormac.

"Nor shalt thou, Owen," said O'Cahan. "You are no Queen's O'Ruairc now, so it were better for yourself and for the success of our enterprise that you should avoid this poet's observation; for this sweet singer is a very sour undertaker, and a most bitter enemy of our faith and nation."

"Then let us ride on," said Owen, "for it waxes late, and no town seems to be in sight."

"Yes," said O'Cahan. "Do you ride on; and three miles along this road you will come to a small town called Doneraile. There you may sleep, and wait for me till noon to-morrow. For it is on my mind to visit this poetical robber, who can tell me much that I desire to know about the province of Munster."

"Belike he can," said Conn. "But will he?"

O'Cahan laughed.

"Nay, if I go to him as Art O'Cahan, envoy of Hugh O'Neill, I grant I will get but English hospitality from him. But if Josiah Ramsbottom, of the City of London, a devoted servant to her most virginal Majesty, strayed in the Galtees on his way to the estates he has undertaken,

should crave a night's lodging, it would go hard with a leal Englishman to deny it."

"Well, come to us at noon," said Cormac, "for if you fail we shall believe some harm to have befallen you, and will return to fetch you out by the sword's point."

"Never fear me," said O'Cahan. And with that they parted—the three younger men pursuing the road to Doneraile and O'Cahan turning to where the manor of Kilcolman showed itself among the trees.

He was admitted to the house by an obsequious English menial, who informed him, on enquiry, that it was the residence of Master Edmund Spenser.

"An Englishman?" queried O'Cahan anxiously.

Very haughty assent from the menial.

"'Tis well," said O'Cahan, as if immensely relieved by the knowledge. "I prithee, varlet, go to your master and tell him that Josiah Ramsbottom, of the City of London, gentleman, strayed in the mountains on his way to his estates in Desmond, and in most direful fear of the wild Irish of these parts, craves his hospitality for the night."

"I will, sir," said the menial, and withdrew.

O'Cahan, left alone for some time, had leisure to examine the fine hall in which he stood. Kilcolman Castle had been a stronghold of the Earl of Desmond, and had been taken, after a stout resistance, towards the end of the war. Those very doors must have been battered in by Grey's cannon; on those very stairs the remnants of the garrison must have made their last stand. Now all was prosperous quietude. The battered walls were repaired, carpets concealed the blood-soaked woodwork of the stairs, the voices of children sounded through galleries that had once rung with the cries of fighting men.

The traveller's reflections were cut short by the appearance of a man—a man with the broad brow, the introspective eyes, the fastidious mouth of a poet; the well-brushed hair, neatly-trimmed beard, and assured manner of the successful man of business; and the general expression of complete and impudent self-confidence of the average Englishman. It could be no other than Edmund Spenser—the praiser of Holiness, who lived in the house

reft from another; the philosopher whose conception of justice was the aggrandisement of his own country; the poet who celebrated in melodious verse the beauty and majesty of Munster, and in insolent prose advocated the extermination of its people.

He advanced towards the Ulsterman with hand outstretched and a pleasant smile.

"You are welcome, Master Ramsbottom," he said. "It doth my heart good to meet a true-born Englishman, for of late I have seen naught but lewd and ill-given Irishmen, that be woefully increased in numbers lately, despite the good efforts of her Majesty to keep them under."

"You speak truly, Master Spenser," said O'Cahan feelingly. "For I have seen so many of these wild and loose people about that I fear to pursue my journey further in the darkness, and so have thrown myself upon your hospitality."

"You come in good time, Master Ramsbottom," said Spenser, "for in half an hour we sup."

"I thank you most heartily," said O'Cahan, hardly yet believing in the complete success of his disguise. For the first time in his life he was thankful for his shortness of stature, without which he never could have played his part; for, small though he was for an Irishman, he overtopped his host by half a head.

A servitor was now summoned who led O'Cahan to a bedroom in the upper part of the castle, while another was deputed to look after his horse. Cleansed of the dust of the journey, he was then conducted to the drawing-room, where Spenser introduced him to his wife, the golden-haired, blue-eyed Anglo-Irish girl whose beauty inspired the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*.

"Is this your first visit to Ireland?" she asked the traveller.

"Yes; and a wild and fearsome country I find it. I verily believe I would sooner pay a shilling an acre for good plain English land than the penny I give for my estates in Desmond."

Mistress Spenser laughed, and then asked him whither

he fared. For a moment O'Cahan was at a loss, but his quick wit saved him.

"Nay," he said, "that I cannot tell you, for there is a barbarous perversity about these Irish names that renders them unpronounceable to an English tongue. I have it writ down upon a tablet in my saddle-bag, by the showing of which I enquire my way; but to utter the word is beyond the powers of Josiah Ramsbottom."

There was fresh laughter at this, for it is a characteristic of the English to believe that anything beyond their comprehension is not worth the comprehending.

"We must reform this," said Spenser. "For whereto serves the conquest of lands whose names the conqueror cannot pronounce?"

Just then supper was announced. During its course Spenser said:

"You come straight from London, Master Ramsbottom, do you not? What is the latest news therefrom?"

Again O'Cahan was in momentary difficulty.

"There is but little," he ventured, "beyond that Tyrone's terms will not be accepted, and that large forces will be sent to bring the traitor to his knees."

"'Tis well," said Spenser, "for his seeming success has put hope into the breast of every traitor in Munster that he shall presently come south and wrest back the forfeited lands from the English. . . . And what else?"

"Marry, there is none else that I know of, being a simple man that moves not much in public. And yet, now that I think on it, I do remember that there was much wonder abroad as to when the third book of the *Faerie Queen* would be published, and much speculation as to the matter of it."

The poet was flattered at this, and smiled with pleasure. And by this ruse he was drawn, as O'Cahan had intended, to talk of himself and his work and abandon the dangerous ground of London gossip. He was even pleased to recite those verses of the *Faerie Queen* on which he had been last engaged, and said that he expected to have the whole book ready for publication in the spring.

At the end of the meal Spenser called for music, and

when that was over the lady of the house withdrew, leaving the two men sitting over their wine.

The poet was still wrapped in the thoughts called up by the melody he had heard, and O'Cahan was wondering how he was going to broach the subject on which he was intent, when Spenser furnished the opening.

"'Twas a sweet tune, was it not?" he observed. "Art musical, Master Ramsbottom? Nay, I need not ask, for, as saith my friend Will Shakespeare—who, if he be but a writer of plays, hath wedded to the bloody deeds and lewd jesting of the stage as fair poesy as exists in our language. Let me see now; how go the lines? Ay, 'tis thus: 'The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved by concord of sweet sounds, Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.'"

"Then am I right musical," said O'Cahan. "But if your friend say true, then must we believe that these Irish are an unmusical race; for, if all I hear of them hold good, they are a crew of such traitors, schemers, and spoilers as the world holds not their like."

"They are, indeed, traitors and spoilers," said Spenser. "But this vice in them arises rather from a misuse of music than from a lack of it. For they have among them many loose fellows, lewd players and singers whom they call bards, who so play upon their souls as to stir them up, not to noble and worthy thoughts and deeds, but to bloody plots and wicked devisings against the peace and good order of the realm."

"Your words astonish me," said O'Cahan. "But I pray you, Master Spenser, instruct me more fully about this licentious and barbarous people; for since I go to live among them it were well that I be not totally ignorant of their ways."

"In sooth," said Spenser, "their ways are very foul and beastly, and in no wise are they given to obedience and civility. But to recount all their wickednesses were as hard as to number those which were hidden in the box of Pandora."

O'Cahan shook his head sadly and emitted a condemnatory clucking of the tongue.

"'Tis even so," said Spenser. "But I will now declare to you those evils which seem to me most hurtful to the common weal of the land; and the first is that they have never yet been taught to obey her Majesty's laws, or even to know the name of law, but instead have always preserved and kept their own law, which is called the Brehon law, which indeed is scarcely deserving the name of law, as you shall judge."

O'Cahan gulped some wine, the better to bear the horrible revelation.

"It is a rule," went on the poet, "in which oftentimes there appears great show of equity, but in many things repugning quite both to God's law and man's; as, for example, in the case of murder, the Brehon—that is, their judge—will compound between the murderer and the friends of the party murdered for a recompense, which they call an eric."

"O abominable!" cried O'Cahan. "And is the murderer then suffered to live?"

Spenser nodded.

"Then it boots not to ask whether they follow our civil practice of hanging the thief of more than three shillings' worth?"

"Nay," laughed Spenser, "if they hanged thieves there would be none of them left living."

"This is indeed a very vile people. I pray you tell me more about them."

"I know not whether any of their customs be so barbarous and uncivil as that of Tanistry, by which they hold their land. For in their estimation the land belongs not to the great lords holding it under the crown, but to the people themselves; and their lords and captains do not succeed, as in the civilised usage, by primogeniture, but by election of the country. For after the death of any of their lords the clansmen assemble together to choose another in his stead; where they do nominate for the most part, not the eldest son, nor any of the children of the lord deceased, but the next to him of blood that is the eldest and worthiest; and then next to him do they choose

the next of blood to be Tanist, who shall succeed him in the captaincy if he live thereunto."

"Truly," said O'Cahan, laughing industriously, "this seemeth to me a rare paradox—that the subjects should rule the prince instead of the prince holding his subjects in obedience! But what remedies do you propose whereby this nation be reclaimed from their savage and ignorant courses and brought round to English civility?"

"There is but one remedy," said Spenser. "Even the sword; for these evils must be cut away by a strong hand ere good can be planted. I have sent in a memorial to her Majesty praying that a thorough conquest may be at once begun. I would have her despatch here sufficient forces to be placed in garrisons all over the country, and these, issuing forth at convenient times, shall waste and kill the cattle of the rebels, which is their chief sustenance, and so in one winter bring them to their knees that they will never be able to stand up again. The end will, I assure me, be very short, and much sooner than can be in so great a trouble, as it seemeth, hoped for. Although there should be none of them fall by the sword nor be slain by the soldier, yet, thus kept from manurance and their cattle from running abroad, by this hard restraint they will quickly consume themselves and devour one another. The proof whereof I saw sufficiently exampled in these late wars of Munster, for, notwithstanding that the same was a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle, that you would have thought they should have been able to stand long, yet ere one year and a half they were brought to such wretchedness as that any stony heart would have rued the same. Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came, creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs would not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death; they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carrions, happy where they could find them; yea, and one another soon after, insomuch as the very carcases they spared not to scrape out of their beds; and if they found a plot of watercresses or shamrocks there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue there withal;

that in short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man and beast."

Here Spenser paused; the poet was touched by his own eloquence, though the man was rather less affected by the episode of human misery that had inspired it than by the fictitious woes of knights and damosels round which his fancy wreathed mellifluous numbers.

But O'Cahan pressed to the matter in hand, saying:

"Now tell me, Master Spenser, how has this cure worked in Munster?"

"Nay, it can scarcely be said to have worked at all, not having been carried out with sufficient vigour."

"And are the people of Munster no more civilised than heretofore?"

"Not a whit. They wallow once more in their lewdness and lawlessness, and many loose fellows have taken to the woods and hills and do grave hurt to the English colonists, sallying forth and killing many and grievously spoiling their lands. Besides which, since ever Tyrone took up arms many even that had been living as good subjects begin to hope that the English will be overthrown and the country be brought back to its former savagery."

"Do you think, then, that they are ripe for rebellion?"

"Ripe enough, I warrant; but I do not think they will stir themselves unless Tyrone himself appear in their midst; for they are all so consumed with jealousy of one another that they will suffer none of themselves to lead them, unless it might be Florence MacCarthy, who, I think, would have little stomach for the business."

"Florence MacCarthy?" said O'Cahan. "I think I heard him well spoken of in London as a most loyal subject to her Majesty."

"Ay. It accords with Florence's policy to play the loyal subject in London; but I warrant her Majesty's health is seldom drunk at Kilbrittain Castle. Neither does her Majesty trust him, though she has ever loaded him with favours."

"Marry!" exclaimed O'Cahan. "That seems strange

to me: that she should be thus gracious to one she suspects to be a traitor."

"Yes. 'Tis strange, but none the less true; and the explanation of it seems to be that the fellow has a sweetness of manner that wins all hearts to him, so that in his presence 'tis impossible to believe ill of him. I have felt the same myself in converse with him, though I know him to be false."

"But you said just now that he would have little stomach for a rebellion."

"Neither would he, for he is overmuch addicted to ease and enjoyment, and therefore averse from enterprises that smack of toil and discomfort."

"Yet you think his affections tend rather to O'Neill than to her Majesty?"

"Affections!" cried Spenser. "He hath none: only ambitions; and he will follow the Queen or Tyrone, whichever serves those ambitions best. Up till now the Queen has shown him favour, and English law has secured to him certain lands which my lord Barry and the undertakers disputed with him. But events have recently fallen out that may shake his attachment. Would you hear them?"

"I am mightily interested."

"You must know then that his wife is the only child of the late Donal MacCarthy, Earl of Clancarthy by letters patent of her Majesty, and MacCarthy Mór by custom of Tanistry. Now the Queen's gracious pleasure is that Florence should succeed in right of his wife to the Earldom of Clancarthy, but Florence—such is the strange nature of these Irish—prefers the barbarous title of MacCarthy Mór. This title, by another wild usage of these ungodly creatures, is bestowed by O'Sullivan Mór, Marshal of Carbery, by the presenting of a white rod. Many of the MacCarthys are ambitious to have it, but O'Sullivan Mór swears he will give it to none but Florence, whose brother-in-law he is. Florence, however, in spite of his swelling ambition, dare not take it without her Majesty's permission, which he ever hopes to gain, though she hateth the title only a jot less than that

of O'Neill. This is one obstacle to his continuance in loyalty, but there is another even stronger. Florence is in his own right Tanist to the other great branch of the sept called MacCarthy Reagh. Now the present MacCarthy Reagh on his election pledged himself in sureties of ten thousand pounds not to interfere with the barbarous custom of Tanistry; yet he has just offered to surrender his lands to the Queen, to be received back and held by him and his heirs according to English tenure. If his petition be granted, as I have no doubt it will, Florence can never succeed him, so that he will be in this dilemma: either to submit to her Majesty's law and pocket his ambition, or to pursue his ambition to the uttermost and hazard all on a rebellion; and I know not which course will be the more distasteful to him."

"And you think that if he rebel the other traitors of Munster will take him for leader?"

"Yes. For he is the most powerful chief in Ireland next to O'Neill and O'Donnell. And if he becomes MacCarthy Mór, as there is little doubt he may, he will be able to put in the field, of his own followers and Uriaghts, six thousand foot and five hundred horse."

O'Cahan had now got all the information he wanted; so, excusing himself to his host on the ground of the long journey before him, he retired to his chamber, there to ponder for hours on the enigma of that chieftain, about whom no two people could agree, whom nobody trusted and everyone loved, and whose adhesion was vital to the great cause.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A FOOL IS FOUND IN THE FOREST; WITH A THIRD OPINION OF FLORENCE MACCARTHY.

The following mid-day O'Cahan rejoined his comrades at Doneraile, and the four continued their journey southward.

"These English are a sweet people!" said O'Cahan in satiric merriment. "It appears that all this slaughter and pillage they inflict upon us is done in pure loving-kindness for our own good—that is to say, to reclaim us from our licentious barbarism to English civility."

"Faith!" said Conn, "it seems that they think their civility flourishes best in a desert." And he pointed to a cluster of ivy-clad ruins by the roadside.

"What news had Master Spenser for you?" asked Owen of O'Cahan, who thereupon recounted all that the poet had told him about the state of Munster. He kept to himself, however, the riddle of Florence MacCarthy.

Still they travelled southward. They crossed the Blackwater at Mallow and the Lee at Inniscarra, and so came into the MacCarthys' country. Once more they were in purely Irish territory; for the late MacCarthy Mór, Florence's father-in-law, first by remaining neutral, and then by a timely adhesion to the victors, had saved his country from the worst horrors of the Geraldine War and the subsequent plantation.

Setting out from Inniscarra in the morning they expected to reach Kilbrittain that day, but they came in for a strange adventure instead. Towards mid-day they en-

tered a forest, through which their road ran for a distance of several miles. They were riding in their usual formation—O'Cahan some yards in front of the others, Cormac between his two companions. The road was unfenced; the trees and brushwood came to its very edges. Suddenly, from the midst of these, a ragged band of men armed with swords and knives came rushing out on the travellers. Three of them leapt upon O'Cahan and tore him from his horse; others assailed Conn and Owen. Cormac, by virtue of his position, escaped attack for the moment. He at once decided to rush to O'Cahan's help, and put spurs to his horse for that purpose. The animal leaped forward, trampling on a man who caught at the bridle, but at the same instant another man, with surprising agility, leaped up behind Cormac and nearly succeeded in wrenching him from the saddle.

It was evident that the attackers wished to take their prey alive if possible. Cormac, however, had no such tender purpose, and having succeeded in getting one hand free he drew his dagger and stabbed at the nearest portion of his assailant's body, whereat the fellow dropped off with a cry of pain. Cormac then came charging down on the men who had unhorsed O'Cahan. The latter, though partly enveloped in rope, still struggled vigorously. One of his captors came running to oppose Cormac with a sword. Cormac, however, parried his blow and, passing on, cut at him from behind and felled him to the earth. The other two still continued to drag their prisoner into the wood, but Cormac leaped from his horse and ran after them. One turned at bay, only to be run through the body by the Ulsterman, and the other immediately fled.

Cormac looked round now to discover the fate of his companions, but the trees obscured his view. Shouts and the clash of steel, however, told him that they were still fighting. As quickly as he could he cut the rope that bound O'Cahan, and the two of them rushed back to the wood, O'Cahan picking up on the way the dropped sword of one of his enemies. A thrilling sight met their eyes as they emerged from the wood. Conn and Owen stood with their backs against a tree fencing magnificently with

five assailants. One man lay dead at their feet, but it was obvious that the two Ulstermen were hard pressed, and Owen appeared to be wounded. Down came Cormac and O'Cahan on the brigands like the charge of a regiment, and with cries of panic the ragged men vanished in the woods.

"That was a noble fight," cried Conn, wiping his brow. "Are you hurt, Owen?"

"No," said Owen, "'tis but a scratch. That fellow with the pike dealt me a jab in the sword-arm." And with O'Cahan's help he proceeded to bind up an ugly-looking flesh-wound.

Suddenly the sound of a whisle rang out in the distance.

"The fellows are calling others to their aid," said Cormac. "Let us seek a more defensible ground."

"Did you not see that cave to which they were dragging me?" said O'Cahan. "Let us go there. I think it is their own lair."

Cormac laughed.

"Hold their own den against the wolves," he said. "'Tis a good notion."

There was no time to be lost, for they could hear the sounds of approaching men. Hurrying in the direction indicated they soon found the cave, whose entry was narrow enough for two men to hold. O'Cahan's surmise proved right. The ambuscaders must have lain here, for some food, articles of clothing, rope and weapons were strewn about the place. Cormac and Conn took their stand in the entrance, Owen and O'Cahan remaining behind in reserve. They could hear their enemies, who were evidently at a loss, beating around in search of them; but five minutes elapsed before they appeared before the cave. The robbers had managed to procure reinforcements, for nine ragged men, two of whom had muskets and two bows and arrows, drew themselves up at a safe distance from the Ulstermen.

The leader of the bandits now called upon the party to surrender, but Conn and Cormac only laughed.

"We shall let you go free," said the fellow, "for a fair

ransom. One of you may go to collect it, and the others shall be well treated until his return."

"Come and take us," said Cormac.

"If you refuse this offer," said the brigand, "we will have to kill you and content ourselves with what we find upon your persons. I give you five minutes to make your choice."

Cormac turned to his leader.

"Let us charge them," he said. "They can riddle us with shot and arrows here, but in the open we shall be a more difficult mark, and we have proved ourselves the better fighters already to-day."

Cormac's strategy was sound enough. The narrow cave was easily defensible against swordsmen, but it held not a recess in which they could take cover from missiles. Their refuge, in fact, was now seen to be a death-trap. But O'Cahan at once rejected the suggestion.

"Remember," he said, "that Owen is wounded and that I am no swordsman; and if we come to grief, as most likely we shall against such odds, who is to deliver O'Neill's messages?"

"But if we surrender and send for a ransom," protested Cormac, "the truce will be over before it arrives, and O'Neill's cause will be served no better. Now if we sally out manfully some of us may fall, but if even one get through safely he can deliver the message."

"I alone am fully acquainted with O'Neill's purposes," said O'Cahan.

"Then," cried Cormac, "let us fall upon the villains, and when the fight is well forward do you slip out and dash for your horse."

"Where are the horses?" said Conn.

"Stampeded long ago, of course," said O'Cahan. "No, Cormac; your plan is valiant but unsound. I think I have a better card to play than that."

"Then in God's name let us hear it," said Cormac.

"Let us see whether Drumfluich have not made the victor's name terrible in Munster," said O'Cahan. And, stepping to the mouth of the cave, he shouted to the brigand leader:

"Do you know whose men we are that you have threatened?" he demanded.

"I care not a snap of my fingers if you be Skinny Lizzie's own children," retorted the outlaw.

"We serve a better than Elizabeth," said O'Cahan. "Ay, and a nearer; and one whose hand is ever heavy on his enemies. For we are O'Neill's men, and it will not be long before he comes seeking us if we do not return to him."

The outlaw seemed impressed. He consulted in a low voice with one of his men, and then said:

"Will you give your word not to attack us while I send a message to our chief?"

"So the bandits have a chief, have they?" said Cormac; but O'Cahan, as if hit by a sudden inspiration, asked:

"Is your chief Donal MacCarthy?"

"No other," said the outlaw.

"Then send for him by all means, for I would have speech with him."

At that the outlaw sent one of his men flying off through the woods, while O'Cahan returned to his friends in the cave, where he passed the time of waiting by explaining into whose hands they had fallen.

Donal MacCarthy was a strange character. A bastard son of the late MacCarthy Mór, he could have no claim to that chief's English title. Irish law, however, was more tolerant, and his claim to succeed to the chieftainship was, subject to the acknowledgment of O'Sullivan Mór, at least as good as Florence's. Now the late earl had been a man of very extravagant tastes, to gratify which he had raised great sums of money by mortgaging to various undertakers some of the fairest tracts of the land of Carbery. Year after year this practice went on, until even the splendid MacCarthy estates began to look meagre. All this was a source of dismay to his likely successor. Donal soon came to realise that if the mortgaging went on for very long the title of MacCarthy Mór would not be worth having, and he decided on a novel method of stopping it. Gathering round him a band of unpropertied and outlawed men he took to the woods and mountains, from

which he made periodical descents on the lands of the undertakers, killing their cattle and tenants, ravaging their crops, and burning their houses. He hoped by these means to scare the honest English yeomen back to their own country, thus ruining their masters, and to render the lands of Carbery not negotiable in the money market. MacCarthy Mór's principal creditors, however, Sir Valentine and Nicholas Browne, of Molahiff, were not to be deterred in their ambition to become great landlords. They armed their tenantry, hired mercenaries, and called in the aid of English troops against the marauder. All to no purpose. Donal in the fastnesses of Desmond was invincible, and as soon as his enemy's vigilance was relaxed, down he would sweep once more on their fertile fields. Still the Brownes would not give in. They went on acquiring slices of Carbery, and as a result Donal became permanently an outlaw, and earned the title of the Robin Hood of Munster.

At length, two years before this story opens, MacCarthy Mór died, and there was a tremendous scramble for what was left of his lands. The will bequeathed the bulk of them to Florence and his wife, and also a good portion to Donal. But on both these legacies the Brownes and many others had claims; and to London they went to urge them. After them went Florence, and after him, to the astonishment of everyone, went the Robin Hood of Munster. Donal, however, was more prudent than men knew. He guessed that in the existing political situation (Clontibret had been fought the previous year) the Queen would be anxious to conciliate a powerful sept like the MacCarthys and would be ill-disposed to favour the undertakers whose rapacity had raised for her much trouble in Munster. His calculations proved correct. He and Florence returned from London with secure possession, whilst the Brownes and the others went empty away.

However, as soon as he was back in his native land, whether in fear that her Majesty's ministers there would show him less leniency than their royal mistress, or whether he hoped by the old method to regain some of what had indisputably passed to the creditors, he returned

to his woods and swamps and to his former courses. Possibly twelve years of the life of a Robin Hood had unfitted him for any other kind of existence.

"And what message can O'Neill have for such a man as this?" asked Owen.

"Tush!" said O'Cahan. "I have no message for him; but I shall flatter him with the suggestion that O'Neill may favour his claims to the territories he wants, and the desire to stand well with our chief may persuade him to release us."

In about an hour a horseman with two attendants rode up to the cave. A big thick-set man with unkempt black hair and beard, he could be no other than the plague of the undertakers. He dismounted quickly, swore volubly at his ragged retainers, told them to be off with themselves, and, approaching the Ulstermen, bowed low and offered many apologies for the treatment to which they had been subjected.

"My villains are too zealous," he said; "but I see that you have punished them heavily. Allow me to offer you the hospitality of my poor encampment for the night."

The Ulstermen accepted the offer, and the two attendants were instantly sent to hunt for their horses, which they found after a prolonged search. The party then set off through the woods for Donal's camp.

They moved in single file along a narrow track that wound in serpentine fashion through the forest, travelling ever uphill. Gradually the character of the soil changed and the character of the trees with it, the rich loam of the plains giving place to a light, loose mould through which the rock frequently cropped out, and which gave an apparently precarious hold to the pine and fir trees that succeeded to the oaks and beeches of the lower slopes. They came at length to a narrow gorge where a group of ragged sentries lounged on guard. The gorge opened out into a small amphitheatre, whose rocky walls, varying from thirty to eighty feet in height, were pierced here and there with the black mouths of many caves. Very few men were about; those there were being of the same ragged type that the visitors had already encountered.

Donal led the way to the largest of the caves, whose mouth was an arch some ten feet high by six broad. Its gloomy interior was lit by a single torch in a sconce on the wall. Donal took this, and with it lit seven others similarly disposed all round the cave. A strange scene was now revealed to the visitors. They stood in the entrance to a large and lofty chamber, whose rocky walls were in parts concealed by tapestries and skins. In the middle of the floor, which was strewn with rushes, was a fine table of polished oak, and scattered around were chairs of various fashions, but all of such quality as is found only in the houses of the rich.

"This is one of my castles," said Donal with some pride. "I see you are surprised to see such richness in so rude a place. All this is spoil—spoil taken in my long years of warfare against the enemies of my country."

At these unctuous words, which the outlaw delivered with calculated emphasis and a searching eye, O'Cahan could scarcely forbear a smile. But with all seriousness he said:

"That warfare, I hear, is now over."

"Never believe it," said Donal with great earnestness. "'Twill end only with my life. You have heard of my visit to England. 'Twas not to make submission I went, but to win a battle in the enemy's camp; and win it I did, so that I tore two thousand good acres out of the grip of those rascal undertakers. Believe me, sirs, Donal MacCarthy will make no peace till the last Englishman is expelled from the soil of Erin. . . . But come. You should be tired and hungry, and evening draws on apace. Ho, there! Michael! Séamus!"

These last words were shouted through an archway at the back of the cave, whence there emerged in obedience two more ragged ones whom their master ordered to prepare supper.

A rude but plentiful meal soon appeared. All through its course Donal kept dropping broader and broader hints of his consuming desire to hear O'Neill's message, but O'Cahan, who had conceived no great liking for his host, remained obtuse to them, though he studied keenly the

clumsy cunning in his questioner's face. At length Donal, driven desperate, put his query point blank.

"'Tis a word of friendly greeting we bring you," answered O'Cahan. "O'Neill has watched your long and gallant warfare against the enemy with growing interest, and hopes that he may count upon your friendship in the future."

Donal hardly knew whether to be flattered or disappointed, and the struggle of the two feelings for mastery of his countenance was comical to see.

"O, yes, yes," he said. "I have always admired him for his fidelity to faith and fatherland and for his exploits in the holy cause; and I shall ever be ready to stand by his side in its defence. But does he mean to strike out more boldly than heretofore? Will he look henceforward beyond the border of his own province?"

He looked O'Cahan straight and hard in the eyes, but O'Cahan bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"That I cannot tell," he answered. "We do not know if the other provinces desire it."

"Sir," said Donal, drawing himself up imposingly, "I can answer for one man who desires it. 'Twas with that very hope in my breast that, alone and unaided, in face of the might of a powerful enemy, and in spite of the indifference, the contempt, even the hostility of my own countrymen—relying upon my own valour and the righteousness of the holy and blessed cause, that . . ." he paused, being so carried away by his eloquence that he had lost sight of his principal verb. "That I began this war," he concluded lamely. "Will you carry my definement so, gentlemen?"

"Sir, to the very anacoluthon," said O'Cahan.

Donal, whose education had not been bookish, took this for a compliment and bowed. There was silence for a while; then he spoke again tentatively.

"There will be others that you would speak to in Munster?" he suggested.

"There are many men of name and position in the province," answered O'Cahan.

"Ay," said Donal. "Many and many, but few of

worth and valour." He leaned forward, bringing his face confidentially close to the Ulsterman's and laying a hand on his arm. "Beware of them," he said. "Most of them would take small thought of bringing a rebel head to Dublin Castle if the lords justices would but smile on them for the service."

"Thanks for the warning," said O'Cahan. Silence fell again. Presently Donal renewed his probing.

"'Tis no shrewd guess that you will presently hold converse with Florence MacCarthy, eh? No, I'll not demand an answer, for I see you set store by your discretion. Florence is a strange man, pulled one way by his ambition, another by his fears, another by his affections, and never master of himself. I know not whether he is more fool or coward, but he is assuredly one or other. He thirsts to be MacCarthy Mór; and O'Sullivan Mór would give him the Rod to-morrow if he would but take it; yet for fear of displeasing the Queen he hangs back. And, for my part, I hope he may decline it for ever; for such a one is no fit head for Clan Carthy in the times that are before us, and he would be but small help to O'Neill when he comes seeking allies in Munster. The right man to be chief of Clan Carthy then would be one who neither fears the Queen nor wants her favour—one who knows how to lead men and to fight against heavy odds. No poet, no lawyer, no courtier, no simpering pleader for graces, no romantic serenader of fair women; but a plain blunt soldier that puts his faith in his sword, not in his tongue; who knows how to use his sword, and——" (he hesitated, again at a loss) "in fact," he wound up, "one who can fight. . . . Such a one"—pausing once more, for effect this time, and thumping the table with his huge hairy fist—"such a one is here to-night."

O'Cahan smiled pleasantly, and said he did not doubt it.

"Do you think O'Neill will help me to the title?" asked Donal.

"Nay," said O'Cahan. "That I cannot promise. O'Neill would not wish to interfere with the right of the

sept to choose its chief, but I am sure there is none he would more willingly see in the position."

Donal smiled complacently. O'Cahan seized an early opportunity to retire to bed, but the others sat up for some hours in conversation with their host, with whom they were more favourably impressed than their perspicacious leader.

As they left the camp next morning to continue their journey, Cormac said:

"Would not this man serve our purpose better than Florence? He has been a brigand, I grant, but has not his provocation been great? He is a soldier, too, and he speaks as if he were devoted to the cause."

"So he got your ear last night, did he?" said O'Cahan in reply. "Yes, he has a blunt soldierly tongue that would please you well, Cormac; but did you not notice his eyes?"

"What was wrong with his eyes?"

"They were large eyes," said O'Cahan. "Large and obtruding like those of a codfish." With which enigmatical remark he rode ahead.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH O'CAHAN MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Still they rode southwards. They passed the Bandon at Innishannon and entered the immediate territories of Florence MacCarthy. Towards nightfall, as the road climbed some rising ground, the travellers obtained a glimpse of the sea, not three miles away.

"We are near our journey's end now," said O'Cahan. "In a few minutes we reach Kilbrittain village, and in Kilbrittain Castle lives the man we seek."

In due course they arrived at a small village at the head of a narrow inlet of the sea. At the end of its only street stood an inn, of a kind peculiar to Ireland: a house belonging to the chieftain dedicated to the free entertainment of travellers. As soon as they dismounted at the door the genial red-faced Brugha came out to welcome them; two boys took charge of their horses; and in a few minutes they were sitting down to a generous supper.

"Ah!" cried Conn, who had felt sadly out of place in the English hostelries of Ormond and Desmond, "'tis grand to be home again."

Next morning O'Cahan set out for the castle alone, for he needed no swordsmen in the diplomatic game before him. He found the place alert, as befitted the times. There were watchmen on the outer walls, sentries at the gate, and a picket of sturdy clansmen in the courtyard. But he met with no difficulty on entrance. The sentries let such a peaceful figure—he had discarded his dagger—pass unchallenged, and the steward, readily accepting his description of himself as Master Toole from Dublin, ad-

mitted him to the castle and showed him into an anteroom overlooking the sea.

O'Cahan had chosen Toole as a safe, non-committal sort of name that might have been Irish, Anglo-Irish or anything else. He requested the steward to make known his presence to MacCarthy, saying that he was a stranger but had messages of import to convey to him.

"The chief is away," said the steward. "He has been in England this month or more."

"And when does he return?" asked O'Cahan, rather dismayed.

The steward did not know, but he would inquire of her ladyship if Master Toole desired.

O'Cahan asked him to do so, and he departed. Left alone, O'Cahan paced the room in some anxiety. MacCarthy's absence from Ireland was indeed disconcerting; it might prove disastrous. Every day of the truce was precious: even if Florence were to return to-morrow and throw himself heartily into the cause he would barely have time to muster his forces for an opportune blow; but the subtle Munsterman would almost certainly require lengthy cajolling ere he could be induced to join the enterprise, so that O'Cahan was almost in despair at this added delay.

In the midst of his reflections the door was flung open by the steward, and a woman entered the room.

A magnificent woman, tall, and with splendid arms and shoulders. Her hair was black, with a lustre rivalling that of the pearls with which it was entwined. Her eyes were hazel; her skin clear, white, almost silvery. Every feature of her face was perfect; the eyebrows delicately arched, the nose Grecian, the chin firm and rounded. The lips were a trifle thin perhaps, but their colouring was unimpeachable. Altogether a creature of such rare beauty as is seldom given to the eyes of man. Yet, though she was without flaw, there was something lacking in her—something few would miss amid such loveliness. Not a touch of seriousness was in her face and not a spark of fun. Lady Ellen MacCarthy could make men rave; but she would make no man dream.

The first impression of the woman, however, was enough to take any man's breath away. As she swept into the room with all the majesty befitting the daughter and wife of chieftains, admiration seized upon O'Cahan. If he had been younger he would have been content to look and worship, but he had trained himself to look twice. He was a sensual man, with a fierce intellectual disdain of his own sensuality, so that even as his senses quickened, his intellect flew to battle, and he looked at her with cool distrust.

"I am the Lady Ellen MacCarthy," she said. "What is your message for my husband?"

O'Cahan read mean yet purposeful curiosity in her tone. He bowed and said that it was a matter heavy and uninteresting to a lady's ear—mere business which could not be transacted save with the person concerned.

"Another lawyer, I suppose," said her ladyship disdainfully. "What new wolf is howling for a slice of our lands?"

"Nay, my business is of pleasanter sort than that," said O'Cahan. "But when may I expect to see MacCarthy at home?"

"We have letters promising his return by Tuesday next."

That was five days hence; long enough, though it might have been worse. Somewhat relieved, O'Cahan thanked her ladyship, promised to return on the day named, and offered to depart. The lady hospitably remonstrated, begging him to spend the intervening days at the castle. O'Cahan, with many thanks, declined, saying that he had other business which he would use the opportunity to despatch. But he could not refuse her invitation to dinner, for the meal was just about to be served.

So presently he followed his hostess to the dining-hall, a great room, whose windows, like those of the one they had left, looked out on the sea. At the end of the hall was a dais on which the family table was set; below the dais were tables for the household, the garrison, and the humbler members of the clan. The hall was full when her ladyship entered with O'Cahan, and on the dais he

could see two men standing, apparently in conversation and looking out of one of the windows. They turned to greet her ladyship, and at sight of one of them O'Cahan's heart stood still.

In appearance this man could hardly be called sinister. He was near sixty years of age, stout, with a coarse round rubicund face, a double chin, and an expression of plausible joviality. He had a pair of enormous hands, red, rough, clammy and fat, with dimples where the knuckles should have been, and short, flat, lustreless finger nails. He was clean-shaven and dressed in clerical black. Such was the outward shell of Miler MacGrath, Protestant Archbishop of Cashel.

Twenty years before Brother Miler had been wrestling with the temptations of the flesh in a Capuchin monastery in Ulster. Whether the flesh had achieved as great a victory over his soul as over his body, or whether the enlightenment of the Reformation had shown him the error of such superstitious ways, or whether he found a civilisation that declined to hang murderers less congenial than one that hanged pickpockets, is uncertain. But whatever the reason, he suddenly renounced his vows of celibacy, his hair shirt, his sandals, and other lewd appurtenances of Popery; abandoned his liege-lord O'Neill for service under her Majesty; took to himself a wife and begat many fair children by her; and so came by degrees to his present position as a pillar of the Established Church.

O'Cahan's acquaintance with him had come about in this way: Shortly before it suited his purpose to take up arms, O'Neill had gone to Dublin under a safe conduct to explain to the Lords Justices certain "suspicious" doings which had been brought to their notice (such as the quantity of lead he bought for roofing that house of his at Dungannon and the number of his clansmen whom he kept under arms). In his train had gone O'Cahan and several other young Ulster nobles to wait upon their lord. They had not been long in Dublin when word was received through the Earl of Ormond (who, though on the Queen's side, was an honourable man) that in spite of

his safe conduct O'Neill was to be arrested. A cordon, in fact, had already been drawn round the city. There was no time to lose, so the party broke up into small groups to seek a way of escape in every possible direction. O'Neill himself succeeded in getting away, but many of his escort, including O'Cahan, had been captured. They were all released, however, some months later as one of the preliminaries to the negotiations following the Battle of Clontibret.

But during his imprisonment in Dublin Castle the governor had come one day to O'Cahan offering, with great show of tolerance, to allow him the services of a minister of his religion. O'Cahan was surprised, for it was death for any priest to enter those parts of the country which were under English jurisdiction. He knew, however, that apostate or sham priests were often made use of by her Majesty's officials to extort secrets from prisoners under the guise of confession, and accordingly, while accepting the offer, he determined to keep on his guard. The priest on this occasion was none other than Miler MacGrath, who, cunningly as he questioned, got no information out of O'Cahan.

And now here they stood face to face once again. O'Cahan knew at once that he was recognised, though the prelate kept his own counsel and showed no hesitation in accepting him, on Lady MacCarthy's introduction, as Master Toole.

The other guest was a snuffy little solicitor from Cork, called Smith. The conversation throughout dinner was almost entirely concerned with the prospects of the war which was so soon to be renewed. The little solicitor was very snappy, abusing O'Neill and his men in round terms, and advocating a surprise attack on him during the truce; justifying such a course by saying that no truce with a rebel was valid.

"Nay, nay, Master Smith," said the Archbishop with a shake of his venerable head. "The Queen's word must be held sacred, it matters not to whom it may be given. Do you not agree with me, Master Toole?"

Master Toole bowed to his grace's superior knowledge

of theology, but thought that rebels were unworthy of any consideration.

"Ah, Master Toole," said the prelate sadly, "we must not allow our loyalty to our Queen to outrun our duty to God. We must keep faith with the meanest of His creatures."

"Besides," put in the Lady Ellen, "O'Neill might beat you."

There spoke the Irishwoman. She was not prepared, as O'Cahan well knew, to risk the loss of her lands in rebellion, but she could not help despising the English. The conversation went on very much in this tone to the end of the meal—the solicitor spitting out loyalty, MacGrath trying to play the cat and mouse with O'Cahan, and her ladyship interjecting a tart remark now and then. As soon as he decently could O'Cahan took his departure and rode back to the village deep in meditation.

"What," he kept asking himself, "was Miler MacGrath doing at Kilbrittain? And would he have been there if Florence were at home?"

Meanwhile an equal wonderment filled the breast of His Grace of Cashel, who was asking himself the same questions about O'Cahan. As soon as the latter had left the drawing-room, whither they had adjourned after dinner, he turned to her ladyship and addressed her casually.

"A fine young man that," he said. "O'Toole I think you called him."

"Toole," corrected her ladyship.

"Ah! Toole. A good name Toole. Did you mark his accent?"

"A Dublin accent, I suppose," said her ladyship.

"Hm! Well, no. Hardly Dublin. Just a little farther north, I should say," and at the word north he surveyed her narrowly without learning anything. "I would call it a Louth accent," he resumed. "What do you think, Master Smith?"

Master Smith, standing by the window looking out to sea, uttered a grunt, as if to imply that the subject did

not interest him. His Grace, having failed to draw the lady, and not knowing whether her innocence was real or assumed, ventured on a broader hint.

"Methinks I have heard such an accent on the Ulster marches," he said.

"Your Grace should be a better judge of the matter than we, then," snapped the solicitor.

Her ladyship laughed merrily, and the prelate found it difficult to keep his countenance. A few minutes later, after having first brought the conversation to lighter topics, he announced that he must be going.

"What? So soon?" cried his hostess.

"Duty is duty, my lady," he said. "Already I have neglected my sacred charge too long." And with almost indecent haste he took himself off.

Instantly Smith stepped up to Lady Ellen.

"Do you know who that fellow Toole is?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, his Grace does; and with his hints and his hums and his pointings to the north he has made me suspect."

At once Lady Ellen caught his meaning.

"Where were my wits that I did not see it?" she said. "This man Toole must be from Ulster, an emissary from O'Neill, most likely, seeking to draw Florence into his tangle."

"You voice my own deduction, your ladyship. And see whether Miler MacGrath be not already galloping to Cork with the news."

He drew her ladyship to a window looking eastwards, from which they could plainly see his Grace's carriage driving at a most unclerical pace up the Cork road.

Her ladyship turned pale.

"If he get him arrested within the territory of Carbery," said Smith, "there will be short shrift for these lands we have fought so hard for."

Lady Ellen saw even further.

"And if he escape arrest and succeed in meeting Florence——"

"Nay, Florence is too shrewd a man to be led into rebellion by any callow bonnacht of Tyrone's."

"Ah, you do not know Florence as I do," answered her ladyship.

"But the main peril," said the solicitor, impatient of side issues. "We must see to that. What if the sheriff of Cork arrest this Toole at the Brugh of Thomas MacHenry, where I have no doubt he lodges?"

"You lack imagination, Master Smith," said her ladyship. "That is by no means the main peril. But trust me. I will dissipate both. Be so kind as to pull that bell-rope."

The lachrymose steward answered the summons.

"Tell Séumas MacSéan Dubh to saddle the swiftest horse in the stables," said her ladyship. "Then let him come here for a letter that I will give him."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH O'CAHAN AND HIS FRIENDS FIND THEMSELVES IN THE DARK.

It was an unpleasant situation that O'Cahan had to discuss with his companions that evening. The mission to MacCarthy must perforce be postponed; how it was ever to be carried out was a problem that must be shelved for the present. The most urgent question was now the safety of the delegation. In all Munster, so far as they knew, there was but one man who could be absolutely relied on; that was Donal O'Sullivan, lord of Beare and Bantry, and to him they resolved to go on the morrow.

They slept that night in two rooms, situated on the same side of a corridor. Cormac and O'Cahan occupied the larger, which was the principal room of the Brugh; Owen and Conn occupied the other. O'Cahan's sleep was broken and disturbed by nightmarish dreams, in all of which the rubicund visage of Miler MacGrath played a prominent part. One of these dreams was particularly vivid. He fancied that he saw Hugh O'Neill struggling in the grip of a monstrous beast with a hundred writhing limbs and the vulpine head of Queen Elizabeth. To his aid came Florence MacCarthy, who had almost reached him when the gigantic figure of MacGrath rose up menacingly in his path. MacCarthy fled; MacGrath, with his evil smile, came to the help of the almost vanquished hydra, and raised a ponderous club over the head of the

exhausted O'Neill. O'Cahan was frozen with horror, so that he could neither move nor cry out. The club descended. . . .

A light flashed.

Next moment he found himself wide awake, struggling in the dark with invisible assailants. His shoulders were held down; there was a grip on his legs; one of his arms was caught. With a sudden effort he freed his right hand from the bedclothes and hit out at the darkness. It struck something soft, and there was a cry of pain. He struck again, and tried to free his legs by kicking. This time his blow spent itself on the air. A hand seeking his throat came in contact with his mouth. He fixed his teeth in it, and as the owner, yelling with pain, shrank back, he succeeded in partially raising himself. At that he was struck sharply under the shoulder, and felt himself grow weak. Then he heard Cormac shout. There was a clash of steel, cries, another shout, Conn's voice in the distance, and the sound of blows.

Cormac too had slept lightly that night, and he woke instantly at the first sound of the scuffle with O'Cahan. He leapt from bed and drew the sword that was never far from his hand. At once he found himself cutting and thrusting with an almost invisible figure in the darkness. Giving a shout to rouse his companions in the next room he made a fierce attack on his dim foe, whom in a moment, more by good luck than skill, he ran through the body. Immediately after Conn burst into the room and found himself at grips with O'Cahan's other assailant, who was flying from the sword of Cormac. Conn nearly wrenched the fellow's arm from the socket and so made him prisoner.

Next minute Owen appeared in the doorway carrying a taper, whose light revealed a strange picture: Conn in the foreground struggling with his captive; Cormac with dripping sword surveying a body on the floor; and O'Cahan, covered with blood, stretched on his disordered bed.

"Look to Art," cried Conn.

Owen rushed instantly to the prone figure. He was relieved to find that O'Cahan had only fainted, and he made immediate efforts to staunch the blood, which was flowing plentifully form a deep wound in the shoulder.

While he was so engaged other steps were heard below. Cormac bounded out into the corridor and reached the stair-head just in time to cross swords with the foremost of two men who were ascending. Whisk! the man's weapon went flying over his head, and a push from Cormac's left hand sent him reeling into the arms of his fellow. Then the two of them fairly rolled down the stairs in desperate anxiety to escape the fiery blade of the Ulsterman. At the bottom they picked themselves up and fled through the open door into the night.

And now all the household was awake. From the upper regions came Thomas MacHenry in his night gown with a lighted taper in one hand and a pistol in the other, while from different quarters emerged three or four serving men armed with cudgels. At once there was a babel of questions, which Cormac answered by sending two in pursuit of those who had fled, and by bringing the Brugha into the bedroom and showing him O'Cahan's condition. MacHenry instantly went for restoratives, by whose aid O'Cahan was presently brought to.

Attention was now directed towards the prisoner, whom Conn had meanwhile bound hand and foot with his own belt and a strip of bedclothes.

"Why, Master Smiggles, is it you?" cried the Brugha. "Gentlemen, this is the under-sheriff of Cork whom you have treated so roughly; and, bless my soul, if that isn't one of his men that you have slain."

"You had best order these fellows to release me, Master MacHenry," growled the under-sheriff, "or we shall presently be putting our hands on you for abetting rebels."

"Whom call you rebels?" asked MacHenry. "These gentlemen have given me assurance of the most heartfelt loyalty to our sovereign lady. I rather fear me that you——"

"Cease this chatter," cried Smiggles. "Call up your

men to release me or you shall suffer for it. I charge you in the Queen's name."

"Nay, Master Smiggles, I fear this was a private enterprise of yours—an attempt, perhaps, on my plate. For those who come on the Queen's errands ask for doors to be opened in the Queen's name. They do not come as thieves in the night. . . . Séamus!"—here he turned to one of the serving men—"convey Master Smiggles to the cellar and leave him under lock and key."

Smiggles was hauled off forthwith, uttering the most horrible threats. All this while Cormac and Conn and Owen had stood ready, sword in hand, for they did not know what side MacHenry would take. Now, the moment Smiggles was gone, he addressed them in anxious tones:

"Gentlemen, is it true what he says? Are you truly O'Neill's men? You may trust me, for I fought for Desmond even in despite of my own chief."

"Yes, we are O'Neill's men," said O'Cahan, who, though very weak, had now managed to assume a sitting posture.

"Thank God your hurt is no worse," said MacHenry. "How many of them attacked you?"

"I think they were but four," said Cormac. "And it seems that two of them kept the doors below. Brother Miler was a fool to think that you had no escort, Art."

"What!" cried MacHenry. "Does Miler MacGrath know you are here?"

"'Twas he that set the sheriff on us," said O'Cahan.

"Then you will find Carbery a dangerous land," said MacHenry. "For Miler has the cunning and patience of a cat watching a mouse-hole."

"Faith, we've tweaked the cat's whiskers," said Conn.

"You have but gained a temporary respite," said MacHenry. "And as soon as O'Cahan's strength is in any way restored you must fly."

"Where can we go?" asked Cormac.

"I will tell you. Not six miles from here, in a secluded valley, where sheriff's men will never venture, dwells Dermot Moyle, brother to Florence MacCarthy. He is a good man, who if he has not Florence's skill and cun-

ning has what pleases me better—a heart and a purpose that a common man may read. You will find him second to none in loyalty—not even to O'Sullivan Beare."

"But what will become of you?" asked Owen. "I fear you run grave risk on our account."

"Nay, fear not for me," said MacHenry stoutly. "I warrant the Sheriff of Cork will not care to offend Florence MacCarthy by arresting one of his clansmen. He is more like to apologise for what has been already done. But your danger is great, so I pray you get ready to depart."

He went out to see to the saddling of their horses. The others meanwhile questioned O'Cahan about his condition. His wound, though not in a very dangerous spot, was deep and painful, and he had lost a great quantity of blood, but he thought himself strong enough for the short ride. With Owen's help he got into his clothes and slowly made his way downstairs, when he turned into the dining-room to rest. One of the windows of this room was open and Cormac went to examine it. The clasp, he saw at once, was broken.

"MacHenry was wrong," he said. "Her Majesty's guardians of the law do come like thieves in the night."

Just then the two serving men who had gone in pursuit of the fugitives returned, with the announcement that their quarry had got away safely on some horses that were waiting for them. This caused the Ulstermen no uneasiness, however. Cork was a long way off, and more prisoners would have been an embarrassment.

At length the horses were brought round, O'Cahan was assisted into the saddle, and the party, with many grateful words to MacHenry, set out on its journey with one of the servants of the inn accompanying them as a guide. It was the coldest hour of the night, for dawn was approaching; and there was no moon. At first they followed the main road running from Kinsale to Bantry, but soon they had to turn up a branch road which was no more than a lane to begin with, and gradually degenerated until it seemed little better than the bed of a mountain torrent; and to make matters worse it was uphill all the way. The

horses stumbled frequently, and once Cormac's nearly fell. All this was very trying to O'Cahan, who, owing to his wound, had little power to guide his horse, which therefore stumbled more frequently than any of the others. Every stumble jarred him horribly. The pain of his wound was incessant, and the slightest movement was enough to cause acute exacerbations of agony. Owen's bandaging, moreover, had been of a rude sort; the bandage was extremely uncomfortable, and the blood, being but imperfectly staunched, kept oozing out and trickling down his side. He was feeling ill too, for the knees of his assailants had bruised his body and done him some internal injury. But sick, pain-racked, and with the beginnings of a fever on him, he rode on uncomplaining. Once, when a particularly bad stumble seemed to tear his wound open and sear the edges with fire, he allowed a slight groan to escape him; but to the solicitous inquiry of Owen, who had overheard it, he replied that nothing was the matter.

Still he looked out anxiously for the end of the journey, and at length it came in sight. The miserable road petered out and disappeared, and after crossing a tract of open country, just as dawn began to break, they entered a narrow wooded gorge. Gradually it widened out and soon became a valley, scattered over which they could see many rude cottages. Still they rode on, till at length they passed through a gate into a garden, in the midst of which stood a good-sized house, which their guide told them was the home of Dermot Moyle.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH MILER MACGRATH REMAINS IN THE DARK.

Dermot Moyle was a simple, quiet, straightforward person whom nothing could disturb. He installed the wounded man in the best room in the house under the care of his wife, and himself went out to prepare a certain cavern not far off as a retreat for the Ulstermen in case of necessity. It was situated in a secluded corner of the valley, its mouth well hidden by dense scrub. The hunted Desmond had once lain there for weeks undisturbed at the end of the Geraldine War. Dermot stocked it well with provisions, placing there also a flock bed for O'Cahan. A mounted man had meanwhile been sent to watch the Cork road so that they would receive ample warning of the approach of an enemy. Dermot, however, was confident that the sheriff's men would not venture into that remote valley unsupported by troops; and in the present critical state of the Queen's fortunes, with every available man concentrated on the Ulster frontier, troops could not be spared for such an enterprise. In Cork the garrison was barely sufficient to hold the circuit of the walls.

All through that day O'Cahan lay in a high fever, but on the next, thanks to the Lady Aileen's skilful nursing, he was much better. He even insisted on calling his host and his three companions to hold a council of war by his bedside. He had not come to Munster, he explained, for the sole purpose of winning over Florence. O'Neill had instructed him to sound also several other men of posi-

tion whom he believed to be attached to the national cause. These could be seen at once, and their decision might influence the elusive Florence.

"Nay," said Dermot, "Florence will hardly move until the battle is already won. For the brain-sick fellow is in everything ruled by his wife, who will let him do nothing that would endanger the possession of his lands."

O'Cahan laughed in spite of his pain.

"Shall we never," said he, "come to the end of new opinions about Florence? We have heard many things against him, but you are the first to tell us that he is weak-willed."

"No, not weak-willed," said Dermot, "but doting. Never did love-sick boy so worship his sweetheart as this man his wife. He is ten years married to her, and yet I verily believe he still writes sonnets to her eyebrow; and when she enters the room where he is I have seen him start and fix his eyes upon her face as though it was their first meeting. Believe me, it were better for you to have her on your side than all the chief men of Munster; but you shall find the men of Munster easier to win."

"I wonder," said O'Cahan, "did Miler MacGrath tell her my name and mission."

"'Tis unlikely," said Dermot. "For Brother Miler has a greedy eye fixed on the lands of Carbery, and it would suit him well if Florence should go into rebellion."

"Then," said O'Cahan, "his purpose would have been better served by leaving me at liberty rather than by having me arrested." His brow darkened with suspicion, and he added: "I think it must have been someone else that set the sheriff's men upon us. 'Tis hard to see how the Lady Ellen could have guessed my errand, and yet——"

"Far be it from me," said Dermot, "to speak ill of my brother's wife. But I know that she loves her broad acres and consequently hates rebellions. I think I will ride over to Kilbrittain to-day and see what I can learn."

"We shall be most grateful," said O'Cahan. "But first look over this list and tell me what you think of the names in it."

Dermot took the paper that O'Cahan handed him and scrutinised it with interest.

"There are few here that I would trust unreservedly," he said at length, "and not many that I would trust at all. These Geraldines, for instance, will fight for religious freedom, but having gained that they would rather be ruled by Elizabeth than by O'Neill. Then there are others here that could never be brought to fight on the same side. They hate each other so that if one joined O'Neill his neighbour would forthwith join the English. The White Knight you should cut out of the list altogether, for a greater liar I never met. As for O'Sullivan Mór, he will do nothing except by the advice and direction of Florence. Of all the Munster chiefs there are but three that will put Ireland first and that can be relied on through good and evil fortune alike. They are O'Sullivan Beare, O'Driscoll, and O'Connor Kerry."

"Then we have a messenger for each," said O'Cahan; and it was arranged that next day Cormac should seek the first named, Owen the second, and Conn the third.

Dermot meanwhile rode over to Kilbrittain. When he reached the town he went straight to the inn and called MacHenry into a private room.

"You did well," he said, "to send these men to me. Does Lady MacCarthy know what occurred?"

"She does," said MacHenry, "and right furious she is. She sent for me this morning to come to the castle, and there she poured out her wrath on me for not assisting the Queen's officers. 'And where have the villains gone?' she says. 'Northward, whence the scoundrels came,' says I. I don't know whether she believed me, but she had to be content with that."

"Have you released Smiggles?"

"He left in chastened mood the morning after. The whole countryside is agog with curiosity, and my men are pestered to death with questions. But none of them knows anything except Séamus, who is my own foster-brother and will hold his tongue."

Dermot wished him good-day and rode on to the castle. He was already more than half convinced of his sister-

in-law's treachery, but he wished to make certain of it. As he approached the castle he noticed a man loitering by the outer gate. Something peculiar about his appearance—he could not tell what—caused Dermot to look at him a second time. He was an ordinary-looking fellow enough, in the costume of the Irish lower class; but somehow he seemed to wear the garments strangely, as if he were not used to them. Noting this casually Dermot passed on into the courtyard.

He did not learn much from Lady Ellen's demeanour. She received him with a cheerful welcome, rallying him for having left her so long without a visit. She left it to him to broach the subject of the affair at the inn, which he mentioned eventually as a piece of chatter he had heard on the road. She treated it just as casually, expressing the opinion that the strangers were thieves or murderers and regretting that MacHenry had given no assistance to the sheriff's men. All the while that she acted the most perfect innocence she watched Dermot closely, for, knowing his opinions as she did, she suspected his complicity in the disappearance of the Ulstermen. In the end neither gleaned any information from the other, and the lady changed the subject.

"Have you heard the latest news about Donal?" she asked.

"No," said Dermot.

"He has proclaimed himself MacCarthy Mór."

Dermot laughed.

"His proclamation will avail him little without the white rod," he said; "and O'Sullivan Mór holds that for Florence, if Florence will but brave her Majesty's anger by accepting it."

"Nay, but hear me out," said her ladyship. "Donal, immediately on proclaiming himself, sent letters to O'Neill offering to become his man and hold the chieftainship from him, and I am beginning to wonder whether O'Neill may not prevail against the Queen."

"Why then," laughed Dermot, "Florence must needs content himself with the earldom."

Lady Ellen flushed at the gibe. Dermot lightly told

her to be of good heart, and took himself off, saying that he had business in Kinsale.

As he rode back to Kilbrittain he meditated upon the news he had just heard. Here was a fresh complication in the already tangled affairs of Munster, one more personal interest threatening to disrupt the national cause. He had been told, of course, about his Ulster friends' adventure with the outlaw, and had no doubt that Donal, guessing the purport of their mission southward, had determined to be first to submit to the new arbiter. He knew that Donal was a man of very shaky principles, covetous and uneducated; such a man pushing his ambitions at such a time was a sign of very ill-omen indeed.

Thus meditating, Dermot reached the village of Kilbrittain. As he approached the inn he noticed some sort of commotion going on round its door. Riding up closer he saw that the centre of it was the peculiar figure he had recently observed outside the castle gate. Quite a small mob had assembled round him, threatening and abusing him, and arguing with one another.

"Get out of this with your spying!" shouted one.

"Put him in the horse-pond!" cried a second.

"String him up!" yelled several.

Dermot dismounted, and made his way through the crowd with difficulty.

"What is all this commotion about?" he demanded.

A dozen different voices were raised in explanation, while the threatened one cowered close to the man in whom he fancied he had found a protector.

"One at a time," said Dermot. "You, Séan, tell me what is the matter."

"'Tis this way, sir," said the man addressed. "This fellow here has been nosing around the house all the best part of yesterday, asking questions about the gentlemen that were staying here. He's been up to the castle too this morning, and now here he is again sneaking around and offering money to the children to tell him where they went."

"That's right," said someone in the crowd. "'Tis a

Protestant spy hunting for priests, and should be put in the horse-pond."

"Priest-hunter!" yelled several at the frightened wretch.

Dermot raised his hand.

"Do not molest him," he said. "I shall see to his proper punishment. Follow me, churl." And he led the way into the inn with the spy at his heels.

The brother of their chieftain was a person of sufficient authority to satisfy the honest clan-folk. After some short delay the crowd broke up and dispersed. Meanwhile Dermot and his prisoner sought out MacHenry in his private room.

"Do you know this fellow, Thomás?" asked Dermot, slinging him into the room by the collar of his coat.

"I do not," said Thomás. "'Tis no Irishman though, for all his saffron coat."

"You are right, Thomás. Now, fellow, tell us your name and all about yourself, and most particularly what you have been doing here these last two days."

The wretch remained obstinately silent, cowering in a corner of the room.

"Maybe a twist of the arm would make him speak," suggested Thomás.

"The fear of it will be enough, let us hope," said Dermot. "Now, fellow, you have heard what the Brugha says. You shall be tortured in right English fashion if you speak not, and afterwards you shall be tied up in a sack and put in the horse-pond."

Still the man kept silence, though he went, if possible, paler.

"This is no idle threat," said Dermot. "The lords of Carbery do not brook opposition, and the Queen herself has not power to deliver you out of our hands."

This was fairly obvious, but the man still held out, in hopes that her Majesty's prestige might be able to help him.

"His arm, Thomás," said Dermot; and forthwith MacHenry seized that limb and gave it such a twist that the poor wretch uttered a screech.

"I will tell you all," he cried; and when Thomás loosed his grip of him he began to speak in quivering tones, nursing his injured arm the while. His Irish was of the lisping sort that marked him an Englishman.

"I am a poor man, your worship," he said. "And——"

"You shall be poorer by a limb if you tell any lies," said Dermot. "Catch his arm again, Thomás, for we will have the truth of him if we have to tear him in pieces to get it."

Another savage twist left the miserable fellow completely at his interlocutor's mercy.

"My name is Walter Baddlecomb, so please you, and I am body-servant to his Grace the Archbishop of Cashel. His grace sent me hither last Thursday, so please your worship, that I might discover to him the actions of a certain man whom he described to me, and who, he said, was a notorious traitor and rebel against her most sacred Majesty. That was all he bid me do, and 'twas my bounden duty to perform it. Therefore I beseech your gentle worship, hold me not hard in your estimation since I am but a poor man, so please you, that must do his duty if he is to see salvation."

"You shall see no salvation," said Dermot, "for I will slay you now in your sins if you tell me not the whole truth."

"'Fore God I have told you all," cried Master Baddlecomb.

"Another twist, Thomás."

"Won't a hot coal on the back of his neck be more persuasive?" suggested MacHenry.

"Nay, nay!" almost shrieked the terrified Englishman. "I will tell all without more ado. He told me also to seek an entry to the castle and mark how the gentleman might be received by the lord MacCarthy and his lady."

"Is that all?"

"That is the whole truth, most worshipful sir. So help me God, I could tell you no more if you tortured me till Doomsday."

"Then you may go," said Dermot. "And mark my words: if ever you set foot in Desmond again you shall

be put to death with such torment that Hell, when you reach it, shall be as a couch of luxury by comparison; and if you speak of anything that has occurred here, be sure that we shall hear of it and shall not rest until we find you."

"Won't we trim his tongue a bit with the shears," suggested Thomás mildly, "just to make sure?"

"Rest you fair, most puissant sir," pleaded the spy. "I will abide no more in this fearsome land, but will hie me home to England by the first vessel that sails from Cork."

"Then begone, thou scum of earth!" cried Dermot, and kicked him out into the street.

"There is no doubt now who called in the sheriff's men," said Dermot sadly to himself as he rode home shortly after, laden with news for his Ulster friends.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH IS HEARD A FOURTH OPINION OF FLORENCE MACCARTHY.

Cormac meanwhile had set out for Dunboy Castle, a ride of some forty miles through a rugged but picturesque country. The castle was an austere and strongly posted building on the farther coast of Bantry Bay, over against Bere Island. Cormac reached it on the evening of his setting out.

O'Sullivan received him kindly, and read his credentials, which were all the written matter O'Neill had deemed it prudent for his envoys to carry. He was a fine-looking man of slender build, with a rather thin and pallid but handsome face, dark hair, and large luminous eyes. His whole expression and demeanour indicated a gentleness, unselfishness and humility of character unknown amongst the nobility of the age. Cormac was not ignorant of his qualities, having frequently heard his father speak of O'Sullivan in terms of the highest admiration. He was therefore painfully surprised when his delivery of O'Neill's message received a sarcastic and insinuating reply. The interview took place after supper in a private study of the chief's.

"So the Queen's favourite does not intend to be reconciled to his patroness?" said O'Sullivan.

Cormac's hot blood tingled at the words, but O'Cahan's parting warning to beware of that temper of his was still sounding in his ears, so with an effort he controlled himself.

"O'Neill's policy," he said, "has enforced on him a show of friendship to the Queen. Ulster had long ago been shireland else. But his heart has ever been Irish, and he has been working for this day always—aye, even when he commanded the Queen's horse in the Geraldine War."

"I have not read his conduct so," said O'Sullivan. "No doubt 'twould serve his purpose well that we should make a diversion here, and so give him the opportunity to deal a heavy blow in the North. Then when he had made peace with honour and been received back into the royal favour, methinks that cold heart would care little for what befell the South, exposed to the full fury of Elizabeth's wrath."

"'Fore God," cried Cormac hotly, "you do him wrong. This quarrel shall not be laid aside until Elizabeth is no longer queen in Ireland."

"Ay, his Uncle Shane said as much in his day, but it availed little, save to keep the North independent behind its impregnable hills."

"I swear to you," said Cormac, "that we will not sheathe the sword until Leinster, Munster and Connaught are as free as Ulster, or Ulster as crushed as they."

O'Sullivan smiled at the lad's earnestness, and said:

"I did but try thee, Cormac. I have watched this struggle of O'Neill's with an attentive eye, and truly my heart was thrilled as the tide of his victories rolled nearer to our enslaved land. But we must be wary, we of Munster. We are not, like you, a compact people with an impassable frontier within which to retire if we are defeated. Half our population is Anglo-Irish, the English swarm among us, our Irish clans are rent with faction, and if we cannot hold the field our people are at the mercy of the enemy. I am old enough to have lived through the Geraldine War. I have seen my clansmen feeding on grass and leaves; I have seen men and women driven in crowds into barns and houses and there burnt to death; I have seen babies slain at their mothers' breasts lest they might grow up to become Popish rebels.

That is war as we know it in Munster; your bickerings on the Ulster marches are comedy by comparison."

"Then you will not join us," said Cormac, disappointed.

"Nay, I said not so. I said we must be wary. I do not love the English yoke, but the leader of a people must take care lest in struggling against it he only make their lot worse. I would not have a rash act of mine bring destruction upon the lives and homes of my poor clansmen that trust me and will follow me at a word. But if O'Neill unite the people of Ireland and they stand loyally by him, then the struggle is not hopeless, but indeed a worthy task for brave men, with a fair prospect of success."

"Then you are with us?"

"If the war be truly national—national in aim and national in extent. But let us have none of your religious wars. The sword must not be laid aside for a promise of toleration, for these English know not the meaning of the word Honour."

"Nay," said Cormac, "if we were truly religious we would rejoice in persecution, and when they beat us with whips would beg to be lashed with scorpions. Therefore I am no Christian, for indeed I love my sword too well. . . . So I may carry back a favourable answer to O'Neill?"

"This is my answer," said O'Sullivan. "If Florence MacCarthy will but make up his mind to be the leader of Munster, Munster will march to Dublin at his back, and I am a Munster man."

"Most fairly spoken," said Cormac. "As for Florence, we would have negotiated with him ere this but that he is in England."

"Florence is too much in England," said O'Sullivan. "I fear me that man has played double so long that he has ceased to be one man and become two—one heartily loving the Queen, the other as strongly yearning towards Ireland. Thus tyranny plays with God's handiwork."

"Then do you fear he will not join us?" asked Cormac.

"I think Florence loves his friends on each side too

well to fight against either. For he likes persons better than principles, and the approval and good opinion of those he likes is meat and drink to him. I verily believe that what will hold him back hardest from our enterprise will be the fear of losing the high place he holds in the estimation of Walsingham and Cecil."

"I like not these complicated characters," said Cormac.

"Howbeit you must win him. For if he do not lead us Munster will go to the wars as a mob of disorganised clans, amongst which Beara shall not be found. If you cannot win him Ulster had best make terms for herself, which she is well able to do."

Cormac rode back to Carbery next day.

Conn MacSweeney and Owen O'Ruairc had also returned with the news that O'Driscoll had promised to follow Florence MacCarthy, and O'Connor Kerry wanted only the word to strike.

O'Cahan's condition had somewhat improved, but he was still unfit to leave his bed. During the absence of his friends he had been trying to decide which of them was the best to send to Florence MacCarthy. The choice lay between Cormac and Owen, for that plain soldier, Conn, was quite unfitted for the business. The chivalrous Owen was likely to be duped by the slippery Florence; but Cormac's hot temper made him of questionable utility as a diplomat. O'Cahan thought for a moment of Dermot, but that honest fellow would be as credulous as Owen. On the whole, the best person would be Cormac, who had a quick wit and a ready tongue. The fact that he was O'Neill's son, too, was a compliment which would not be wasted on the easily flattered Munsterman.

So next day he called Cormac to his side and formally entrusted him with the mission, detailing in full what part O'Neill expected Florence to play on the expiration of the truce. Finally he gave him advice as to the best way to conduct the negotiations, with many warnings and precepts of discretion, and a full-length portrait of his Grace the Archbishop of Cashel.

"Beware especially," he said, "of the Lady Ellen, for 'tis plain from what Dermot tells us that she is a dan-

gerous enemy to our expedition. Make such a detour in approaching and leaving the place that none may guess where we lie. Keep a close guard on your tongue, and remember that on you hangs the fate of Ulster and of Ireland."

Thus tutored, Cormac set out for Kilbrittain to measure his wit against the subtlest brain in Munster, with eight days of the truce still to run.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH FLORENCE MACCARTHY APPEARS.

The Castle of Kilbrittain was all agog with excitement on the day when its lord was expected. The clansmen of Carbery had gathered there from miles around to welcome their future chief, or to learn whether they were still the free followers of MacCarthy Mór or the tenants of some surly Undertaker. His brother Dermot was there, also eager for news of the lawsuit, and perhaps to make it clear to her ladyship that if any Ulstermen should happen to appear, they had no connection with him. Smith, the worthy family solicitor, was there to hear how his opinions had been justified and to offer more if necessary. His Grace the Archbishop of Cashel was there for reasons best known to himself; and there was not a face in all that concourse which his prying eye did not study, nor a voice raised at which he did not cock an attentive ear.

At length the great lord himself appeared, mounted on a fine black steed, a train of attendants behind him, and half the population of Kilbrittain at their heels; and at the sight a wild cheer burst from the assembled clan. A worthy son of the Kings of Desmond he looked, proud and handsome and of herculean proportions. He stood a head taller than any man in the land, as could be seen when he dismounted in the courtyard. With a smile and a wave of his plumed hat he acknowledged the salutation of his people, and as they thronged through the gateway

in their eagerness for what he had to tell he addressed them in cheerful tones.

" Men of Clan Carthy," he said, " I thank you for your faith and loyalty. All that we are in doubt of is not yet settled, but all will be well. And you may rest assured that while Florence MacCarthy lives he shall never be at peace while a single son of Carthach holds his lands of a stranger."

The people gave a great cheer at this. Miler MacGrath, sitting at a window of the keep, heard the speech and the cheer, and an evil smile spread over his countenance. Florence entered the great hall of the castle, heartily greeted his brother and Master Smith, and made his way with eager hasty step to his lady's boudoir.

" Queen of my heart!" he cried, gathering his wife into his arms with all the ardour of first love. She responded almost as rapturously, for, mean as her soul might be, she had the passion of the splendid female animal she was.

These two had braved the wrath of a mighty queen for love. It had been Elizabeth's desire to marry the only child of the Earl of Clancarthy to " some worthy English gentleman" so that his estates might descend to a " loyal subject," and the dreaded title of MacCarthy Mór become a powerless name. One Nicholas Browne, son of Sir Valentine, the principal mortgagee on the estate, had made application for the prize; and in face of the fury of the clan at this proposal to taint the royal race of MacCarthy with plebeian blood, the earl had given his consent. At that young Florence MacCarthy had arisen to defend the dignity of his house. On the very eve of the ceremony he carried off the bride-to-be and married her himself. Great was the anger of Elizabeth. Any Irishman would have been bad enough, but the passing of the sceptres of MacCarthy Mór and MacCarthy Reagh into one strong hand was a prospect of dread to a government that existed by dividing and conquering. Many weary years Florence had passed in London Tower for that escapade, and in London Tower he would still have been but for that oft-remarked charm of his, which had

won him the affections of her Majesty and the bulk of her Privy Council as well. As it was, he was still considered on parole.

"Have you your freedom yet?" was her ladyship's first question.

"Not yet, my love. But I shall have it before long. And as for the lands, we have rid them of all claims, save only Molahiff, to which young Browne has a most comprehensive title. Yet I see in it a flaw, which I may yet put to good use. But no more of business. What is Miler MacGrath doing here? I saw his ugly face at a window as I rode up."

"I think he came to welcome you. He has been here very often of late, making kindly enquiry about your suit."

"Hm! He might better have welcomed me at Cork, where I landed. I think he is smelling round for what he can pick up himself. I pray that in future you use him coldly, and so discourage his visits."

"I shall do so. But, good my lord, have you heard the news about my base brother, Donal?"

"What news?"

"He has proclaimed himself MacCarthy Mór."

Florence laughed.

"If he proclaimed himself Pope," he said, "he would have as much chance of being recognised."

"There is more in it than that," said her ladyship. "He has sent letters to O'Neill acknowledging him as his lord."

"Then he shall hang alongside O'Neill," said Florence. "Poor simple Donal! He ranks Drumfluich with Cannae. But even Cannae did not break the power of Rome, nor shall twenty Drumfluichs break England. My love, this Donal in trying to ruin me has served me well. The Queen loves not the name of MacCarthy Mór, but she would rather see it held by me under her approval than by Donal as vassal to O'Neill."

"Could it be possible," asked the lady, "that O'Neill might prevail against the Queen?"

Florence laughed again.

"A mouse has more chance to prevail against a cat," he said. "For indeed a cat cannot follow a mouse beyond his hole, but O'Neill shall find *his* hole assailable if he tempt her Majesty to the utterance. But what does O'Sullivan Mór say to Donal's candidature?"

"He says he will give the rod to none but you if a thousand O'Neills commanded otherwise."

"'Tis well. These Ulstermen must be taught their place. And so, my love, we but meet to part again, for this news must be acted upon with all speed. I must away to London to-morrow, and . . ."

"My lord! So soon!" remonstrated Lady Ellen. "You make me wish your ambitions less, for they tear you so often from my side. Surely you will lose nothing by tarrying a day or two?"

"Then two it shall be," said Florence, "but not an hour longer. Cheerly, my love, I leave thee now for the last time, and when I return 'twill be as MacCarthy Mór, and yourself shall be the first lady in Munster."

As much of the following day as he did not devote to his wife Florence spent closeted with his solicitor. Lady Ellen meanwhile was far from easy in her mind, and, in fear of that Ulsterman's re-appearance, had begun to regret the postponement of her husband's departure. As far as any nature can understand a higher one, she understood Florence. She was sure that his lightly-expressed contempt for O'Neill was not the utterance of the real man; for Florence was over susceptible to environment, and the London influence was still strong upon him. He might laugh at O'Neill to-day; to-morrow he might love him; in a week he might follow him. She had an uneasy consciousness that there was hid somewhere in Florence's nature a quality—something she could not call noble, for she knew not the meaning of the word—but something incalculable, which the boldness of an enterprise like O'Neill's might quicken to she dared not contemplate what end. Left to himself it might never occur to him to change his allegiance (especially after such favours as she anticipated from his London journey), but an appeal from O'Neill might stir that hidden

fire aforesaid, might offer glittering but precarious prospects to his ambition, would certainly tempt that dangerous vanity of his. Lady Ellen would run no risks. At all costs these persuasive Ulstermen must be kept from her lord's ear.

Accordingly she summoned to her the steward of the castle, a grim, lantern-jawed fellow, by name MacThomas, an old retainer of her father's, and on that account far more devoted to her than to his master. And while Florence and his solicitor wrestled with musty crabbed documents, and Cormac spurred along the roads of Carbery, these two sat down to plan how to keep them apart.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE MOON SHINES.

Cormac arrived at Kilbrittain on the same day as Florence, but, deeming it better not to approach him at once, he spent the night in the woods wrapped in his shaggy mantle. "To an Irish rebel," says Spenser, "the wood is his house against all weathers and his mantle is his couch to sleep in." So it is not surprising if Cormac, condemned to an English disguise, kept that valuable garment rolled up behind his saddle-bag.

Next day he rode up to the castle and was received by the keen-eyed old steward, who showed him into the same room where O'Cahan had formerly waited. "Cormac MacHugh of Dundalk" was the designation given by the young man, and he craved an interview with the chief. Off went MacThomas, and was back in three minutes with the information that MacCarthy was resting after his journey and could see no one.

"But I *must* see him," said Cormac. "I have a most important message that must be delivered at once."

The steward departed, and was absent about five minutes this time.

"MacCarthy cannot possibly come down to-day," he said; "but if you return at four o'clock to-morrow he will see you."

"My message cannot wait," said Cormac. "Tell your chief my name once more; say that I am indeed MacHugh, and that I will not leave until I see him."

Once more the steward withdrew, and Cormac, hot

with impatience, was left striding up and down the room for some twenty minutes. He was hot with indignation, too, at his rude reception. To be kept waiting like this as if he were some merchant or tradesman was a sore blow to the pride of an O'Neill. He began to wonder whether Florence's unwillingness to receive him were due to ignorance or knowledge of his identity. Then the thought occurred to him that his messages might have been intercepted by the wily Lady Ellen, and he was about to go and seek out Florence himself when he heard a step outside the door. Turning towards it eagerly he received a staggering surprise. Instead of the man he expected, a beautiful woman stood before him. It could be no other, he guessed at once, than the Lady Ellen, for two such exquisite creatures could not possibly exist within the compass of one world. He bowed low and offered her ladyship his humble greeting.

She laughed at the title—a rippling laugh, full of merriment.

"I am not the Lady Ellen," she said; "I am only Honoria, her half-sister."

She gave him her hand; he kissed it; and as he looked in her face he fell straightway into the abyss of love.

"You seek to hold converse with Florence, do you not?" she asked. "And I know what you would say to him too," she added with an arch look. "You are from Ulster, lad—Nay, do not deny it," as Cormac made a gesture of dissent. "Your very speech tells me so, and I love you for it."

Cormac blushed with pleasure, and could not contradict his fair questioner.

"There now," went on the lady, "I know all your secrets. Ellen has guessed who you are and has told me, little thinking that all my hopes are with O'Neill."

"Then perhaps you can secure me this interview," said Cormac eagerly; but the lady shook her head.

"No, young man," she said. "You must fly, and immediately. Your life is not safe here for an instant. A dozen men have sworn to Lady Ellen that they will kill you if you try to have speech with Florence."

"I fear them not," cried Cormac, glad for the first time that he had undertaken the venture. "We of the North are accustomed to facing odds ,and "—here he tapped his hilt affectionately—"this sword of mine has carved a lane through my foes ere now."

"I do not doubt your courage and prowess, young man," said the lady. "But here you know not who is friend or foe, and you might fall to a dagger before ever you could draw."

Cormac felt his first taste of fear at those words, but he put the feeling from him manfully.

"Still," he said, "it were but a poltroon's part to fail my prince. I must accomplish my end by skill and address, that is all; and may I hope, fair lady, to be helped by you?"

"Let me deliver your message for you," she said.

"Nay. 'Tis a long one, and I have sworn to deliver it by word of mouth."

"O, what can I do to dissuade you from this enterprise?" cried the girl tearfully. "'Tis certain death for you to take three steps in Florence's direction."

"Where is he?" said Cormac, tremendously flattered by her concern. "For see him I must."

"No," cried the lady, putting her back to the door. "I will not let you go to your death."

"I thought your heart was with our cause," said Cormac. "Yet you set my poor safety above it."

"That is the way of us women," said the lady. "We know the cost of the making of a life, so we grudge the spending of it. But do not fear, young man. You shall speak with Florence, and in safety too, by my contriving."

"Thou art the very pearl of Munster," cried Cormac.

"Nay, but hear me. Get you gone now, and to-night, an hour after sunset, come to the western wall of the gardens, in which there is a small gate that you will find unlocked. Enter, and follow the right-hand path until you come to a summer-house. There you may wait until I bring Florence to you."

"And will he come?"

"I warrant you he will. Ellen would keep him loyal

to her Majesty, but his own affections, as he has often revealed them to me, are given to O'Neill."

"Then I will take my leave," said Cormac, as he kissed her hand. "Fair lady, I am your servant ever. When shall I have the joy to look once more into your queenly eyes?"

Cormac was nothing if not a frank wooer, but then, young as he was, he had had plenty of practice. He said this, the young rascal, with an air of well-simulated bashfulness, as if to atone thereby for the boldness of the words. His divinity looked at him coyly, and said she thought O'Neill's business was urgent.

"'Tis urgent, indeed," was Cormac's reply, "but so is my love. Therefore in this I make a soldierly haste that both may progress together."

"Quick fires are soon quenched," said the lady.

"But they burn brightest," answered Cormac.

The lady laughed. "Perhaps," she said, "I shall be at the summer-house before Florence arrives."

"Sweet maid," cried the youth. "I shall be there before the gloaming."

"No, no," she said. "On peril of your life, come not till after dark. I'll see that Florence shall not interrupt too soon. Now go," she added. "We must not be seen together." And as he made ready to kiss her lips she flung open the door.

Promptly on the fall of darkness Cormac passed through the door in the garden wall. It was a wonderful summer night, with a young moon rising, the scent of flowers in the air, and the wash of the sea sounding in the distance. Softly he stole along a narrow path walled with clipped cypresses till he came to a circular space, in the midst of which stood the summer-house. He entered it eagerly, with beating heart and limbs atremble, but his lady was not within. He came out again and explored the surrounding space till he found another narrow path pointing straight towards the castle. Down that he guessed she would come, and awaited her there. And

presently she appeared in sight, a graceful figure, muffled in a grey cloak, that rustled softly towards him.

"Fair evening star," he cried as he met her half way, but she put a finger on his lip and led him back to the summer-house, where she yielded him the kisses for which he hungered. And so in sweet lovers' play they passed a pleasant hour, until at length Cormac started guiltily at the remembrance of his duty.

"Florence should be coming soon," he said.

"O single-minded cavalier!" cried his lady reproachfully. "Are you then tired of me already? Will you be sorry to hear that Florence will not come to-night?"

"Faith, 'twill be a very diluted sorrow," admitted Cormac, still with his arm around her waist. "But truly, Honoria, I must not fail in my duty."

"Nor shall you. I spoke with Florence to-day, and right eager he was to meet you. He would surely have come to-night but that he could not do so unobserved. For Ellen will scarce let him out of her sight, and we have in the castle, as a most unwelcome guest, Miler MacGrath, Archbishop of Cashel, that is a bitter enemy to O'Neill, and has a most wary and suspicious eye. But Florence will go riding alone to-morrow afternoon, and if you will be in waiting in the beech grove beyond Kilbrittain you shall gain your interview with him."

Cormac thanked her fervently for her good offices, kissing her hand repeatedly. She sat there submitting graciously to his caresses, serene and beautiful in the moonlight that flowed through a window in the roof and sparkled among the diamonds in her hair.

"I would I knew the meaning of that message of yours," said she, letting slip the cloak that enveloped her to reveal a wondrous evening gown of scarlet satin, cut low over the loveliest bosom in all Ireland. The young man, looking into her sweetly smiling face—expressive only of the most naive and childlike curiosity—though almost dazzled by her beauty and half choked by emotion, still retained his self-control.

"Nay, that I cannot tell you," he said.

She pouted prettily.

"Truly I cannot," he repeated.

"I see you do not trust me," she said.

"I would trust you with my very life," he protested; "but the secret of my prince is not mine to reveal."

She put an arm round his neck and drew his cheek against hers; then "Am I not your friend and ally?" she whispered coaxingly.

He was nigh intoxicated with such sweet intimacy. Her hair tickled his face, her breath played warm upon him, and he inhaled the fragrance of her flesh. A harder battle than sword could win be fought that night, but in the end his manhood prevailed.

"My sweet Honoria, ask me no more," he prayed; but she turned him a haughty profile and said:

"No, I will ask no more; and do you look elsewhere for a helper, for I see that you love me not."

He was cut to the soul by her anger, yet his purpose remained unshaken.

"Dear heart," he said, "I love you more than all the world, and therefore must I keep my honour unstained; for he that would break his plighted word would be no fit lover for so fair a maid."

To his delight her displeasure seemed to vanish, and she turned to him with a repentant air, crying that she was wrong.

"Thou art a noble lover and worthy of a queen," she said softly, wooing his cheeks with her two hands. "I will not press thee further; but oh! my heart, I would I knew if the coming times hold danger for you."

"No more than a soldier expects, sweetheart," replied Cormac stoutly.

"No more than that?" she queried, pushing the hair back from his brow and looking deep into his eyes.

"No more, I swear," he said confusedly; and with that she seemed satisfied, and taking up her cloak prepared to go. So they parted with a loving farewell, and all night long he dreamed of her as he lay wrapped in his shaggy mantle under the summer sky.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH FLORENCE CHOOSES BETWEEN THE SWORD AND THE PEN.

The beech grove beyond Kilbrittain was a little wood of mighty trees, situated in a hollow a mile north of the village. Cormac was there punctually at four o'clock, as he had been directed, but no Florence appeared to meet him. He waited a while, and then rode up to the lip of the hollow so as to look down the road. Not a soul was in sight. He began to feel uneasy now. Already time enough had been wasted, and he felt partly to blame for allowing it. What would O'Cahan and the rest think of the delay, impatient as they must be in their quiet valley? Had his dilatoriness given the Lady Ellen time to weave an impenetrable web around her husband? Was Florence only postponing and postponing the meeting in order to avoid it altogether? Such were the questions that kept asking themselves in his bothered brain.

Half an hour he waited, and then a cloud of dust appeared at the bend of the road. He gave a gasp of relief. It could only be Florence, he told himself, and turned back into the wood so that none should see their meeting. The sound of hoofs approached. They left the road and came trotting over the turf. Then horse and rider appeared on the crest of the ridge.

It was Honoria.

He was glad and disappointed by turns. To see his lady again was a joy indeed, but to let another day go by without seeing Florence would bring the whole expedi-

tion to nothing. The thought made him curse himself for his folly in having failed, when once within the castle, to force his way to the chief and wring a decision from him. Such had been his original intention, and as he recalled how he had been baulked he almost hated, while he loved, her who had been instrumental in doing it.

She rode up to him with a bright smile and a wave of her whip.

"Are you not glad to see me?" she asked as he helped her to dismount and tied both their horses to a tree. "I' faith, never saw I cavalier meet his lady with so melancholy a face. You shall smile sweeter, sirrah, ere you kiss the tip of my glove."

But Cormac could not summon enough merriment to win even that meagre prize.

"Alas! Honoria," he said, "you know not what hangs upon this meeting with Florence which you have failed to procure me. I wish I had not heeded your warnings and cut my way, if necessary, to his presence."

The lady was pleased to be regretful too.

"My hopes rise and fall with yours," she said. "Florence is not the man I thought him. Ellen overheard every word we said last night, and has so wrought upon him—for indeed he madly dotes upon her—that he has sworn that he will have no say with you, and has ordered his men to refuse you admittance to the castle."

"Then back I go," said Cormac, "to hew a path through them with my sword," and he took a step towards his horse.

"Stop, rash boy!" cried the lady, detaining him by the arm. "You go to certain death. Can one man assault a castle that has withstood armies? I would have told you, when you interrupted me, that Ellen has made it known among the men that she will shed no tear if one of them makes an end of you in the altercation."

"Pah!" exclaimed Cormac. "Let them make an end of me. I deserve no better for allowing a woman to hold me back from my duty. Unhand me, Honoria. I am no man if I make not my way to Florence or die in the attempt."

Roughly he tried to shake her off, but she clung to him with many prayers and entreaties.

"Let me go, woman," he shouted. "By heaven, I love you not if you would see me dishonoured."

At that she gave a shriek and fell fainting to the ground. Cormac was plunged in despair at this predicament. Dropping on his knee beside her he chafed her hands and made clumsy attempts to loosen her dress. All to no purpose; she lay completely still. The young man was torn between conflicting duties. To abandon a woman in such a condition was little short of murder; but to abandon his quest—that was unthinkable.

"Curse the woman," he muttered in bitter realisation of how his amorousness had drugged his energy. As he looked at the limp form on the ground it shamed him to think that his manhood had been enslaved by a thing so feeble. For Cormac was an Irishman, having, as an English writer puts it, a kind of chastity even in his sins. His was none of the erotic sentimentality so common in the neighbour isle; he could love lucidly, doubt while he doted, and wrestle with chains even while he felt their bondage sweet. So now his dilemma was solved even as it was presented. He must go; but as he rose he suddenly remembered that he had noticed a little stream flowing through the grove. He rushed to its bank, drew a capful of water and dashed it in the lady's face. The effect was magical. She regained consciousness at once and sat up, blowing most unromantically.

"There was nothing else for it," apologised the youth, and kissed her damp face three times. "I can wait no longer," he said. "Duty must be done, whoever faints for it. Say you are well before I leave you."

"You would leave me whether I were well or not," said she.

"Only because I carry the cares of a nation," said he. "Otherwise you would find me a most tender nurse. Goodbye, my sweet. If I should fail, write to my father and tell him how I died." Here he leaped to the saddle.

"Who is your father?" asked the lady.

"Hugh O'Neill," said he; and, with a last wave of the

hand, put spurs to his horse and in an instant was out of sight.

Like a fury he dashed along the road to the castle, and shot through the gate like an arrow, meeting, to his surprise, with no touch of opposition. Leaping from his sweating horse, he rushed at the great door and beat on it with his fists, to the no small amusement of the bonnachts in the courtyard. It was opened almost instantly by a youthful servitor, who was astonished to find his arm seized in a crushing grip as soon as the door was shut.

"Hear me, thou slave of a woman," cried Cormac. "Conduct me straight to thy lord's presence, or by my hand I'll rip thee to the nave. Lead on, thou jelly."

The youngster was trembling so violently as to justify the appellation, but he summoned enough pluck to say: "Wouldst kill him, sir?"

"Nay," said Cormac. "This sword is for them that would stop me. I have nothing but words for Florence; therefore lead on, for I am in a monstrous hurry."

Nearly all that day Florence and his solicitor had been going over documents in the former's study. Late in the afternoon Florence began to tire of this occupation and pushed the papers from him with a yawn.

"Tell me, Master Smith," he said, "do you understand women?"

"I am not a wizard, my lord," replied Smith caustically.

"No," said Florence with a laugh, "but you are a married man. What would you think if your wife implored you to stay with her one day and bid you begone the next?"

"I would think nothing of it," said Smith, "for I have never known her be of one mind two days running."

"Nay, but hark you, Master Smith. What if you had come home after a long absence and your wife hung about your neck with pretty supplications not to leave her again; what if then, when later you deferred your departure by a day, she should earnestly entreat you to go at once?"

"Faith, I would not know what to think."

"Nor do I. All I know is that that is how Ellen conducted herself when I told her I would not leave this morning. She said she was afraid the suit would miscarry in my absence."

"Then you may be sure she had some other reason," said Smith. "Perhaps she was afraid you would murder Brother Miler if you saw much more of him."

"If so, she was right. Curses on his oily face! When shall we see the last of him?"

"Not while you have so excellent a board," said Smith. "Get you a cook that will burn your sauces, and you shall have fewer visits then, I warrant."

Florence laughed, saying that he wished he could believe it. "But let us come now to this question of Molahiff," he said, pulling another pile of documents towards him. "It is to these lands that Browne has the strongest title, but in perusing the documents I have struck upon a point that has escaped even your legal eye. Where is it now?" He turned over page after page rapidly till he found the place he wanted. "See this now. 'Should the earl die without heirs, then doth the Queen assign the seignory to Browne for ever.' Mark that word *heirs*, Master Smith. 'Tis there we have them on the hip. I know not whether the scrivener was at fault, or whether Browne himself made the slip, but this document says nothing about heirs male, as we had thought, and . . ."

"Marry!" cried the solicitor. "Browne spoke too soon when he talked of Molahiff as *his* seignory. His seignory forsooth! We'll beggar the fellow. The point will hold good at law, I'll stake my head on it."

At this moment a voice without called: "Beware, my lord! One comes." Then it was stifled. Cormac's guide had determined that his chief should not be taken unawares. Florence faced about, but he was weaponless. The door was flung open and Cormac burst into the room, sword in hand.

"Fie! my lord, fie!" he cried, seeing the chief's occupation. "Suing for lands, forsooth, when a blow would make them yours."

Florence made as good a show of courage as a man can when he is carefully getting behind a table. The little solicitor made no move, but said calmly :

" Put up your blade, boy. We are unarmed."

Cormac turned on him fiercely, crying : " You are one of those that would have barred my way. I spare you the steel, but if you hinder me again I will choke you with these hands."

" What do you want, young man?" asked the puzzled lord of Carbery.

" You know me well, MacCarthy," said Cormac. " I am he whose messages you received yesterday, and whom you were to meet to-day at the beech grove."

" 'Fore God, I think he's mad," said Florence to the solicitor. " I received no messages, lad, nor did I promise to meet any man to-day."

" 'Tis surely a madman," said the solicitor. " Know, young swashbuckler, that MacCarthy is not to be threatened in his own home by any wandering son of the road. Therefore be gone ere we have thee whipped from the door."

" I am no son of the road, thou vile crossbred inkspiller," shouted Cormac. " Nor do I threaten you, MacCarthy, though by my hand of valour I'll skewer the man that bars me from you. I bring you a message from the first man in Ireland, and straightly will I deliver it if you will but send this henchman forth."

" Leave us, I pray you, Master Smith," said Florence, and the solicitor strutted out with perky dignity.

" Now, my lord," said Cormac, " will you hear the message of Hugh O'Neill?" And he handed over his credentials.

" Most willingly," said Florence, glancing over them. " But first tell me the meaning of what you said just now. What messages did you send? And what made you think I would meet you to-day?"

" What?" cried Cormac. " Did not that sour-faced steward come to you three times asking you to see me? Did you not reply that you were resting and could not

come? Call him here that he may witness if I speak truth."

Florence was clearly mystified.

"'Tis the first I have heard of question or answer," he said.

"But the lady Honoria," said Cormac. "Surely she did not lie? Did you not promise her to meet me to-day?"

"The lady Honoria?" asked Florence. "What Lady Honoria?"

"Your sister-in-law," said Cormac in surprise.

Florence laughed and said he had none.

"Then who," stammered Cormac, "who was the beautiful dark woman . . ?" He could go no further. Already he had begun to realise how he had been tricked.

"I think," said Florence with a smile, "that must have been my wife."

The dupe of a shallow traitress; the plaything of a married woman; poor Cormac was overwhelmed with anger, self-reproach and shame, and his cheeks flamed red at the thought of his desecrated love-making.

"She has hedged you well in, my lord," he said bitterly.

"But you have passed the hedge, lad," replied Florence. "Come, let me hear your message. It has been delayed overlong."

But at this moment the door was flung open, and Smith rushed in at the head of a party of armed clansmen.

"There's the man," he cried, pointing to Cormac. "Seize him quickly."

Cormac whipped out his sword and backed against the wall, but Florence checked the advance of his men.

"Back," he said. "This is no enemy. I thank you for your zeal, Master Smith, but 'tis unnecessary. You may go, good fellows, and let one of you order my horse to be brought round."

The bewildered men obeyed their lord, but Master Smith stood for a moment dubious what to do.

"Ah, Master Smith," said Florence. "So my foolish froward wife has set you to watch over me. Tell her that MacCarthy has ever been sufficient for his own pro-

tection, and leave me now, old man, for I would be private."

After Smith, in very ill-humour, had departed, Florence turned again to Cormac, saying:

"Am I not well looked after? I marvel that you ever found me. But come, let us go for a ride. I am nigh suffocated with the dust of these documents, and we can talk better away from here."

They descended to the courtyard accordingly, mounted their horses, and rode out through the gateway. As they did so they espied, coming slowly down the road, the dejected figure of the Lady Ellen. She went pale on seeing her husband side by side with the Ulsterman; and as for Cormac, he blushed all over his body. But Florence showed himself in no way perturbed. He did not stop, but, coolly saluting his wife, he passed her without a word. Cormac followed. Immediately outside the castle gate a narrow unfenced road branched off the main one, and doubled back in a south-easterly direction to wind along the sea coast. The sky was cloudy, the sun low, the sea cold and green, and there was a stiff breeze blowing. The sting of it on Cormac's cheek revived somehow his fallen spirits, and for the first mile or so Florence entertained him with a light flow of talk on trivial subjects, so that soon the young man found himself yielding to that charm which had captivated Burghley and Elizabeth.

Gradually his self-confidence returned, and he began to prepare what he was going to say, running over the lines of approach to the subject laid down for him by O'Cahan; but before he had made up his mind to begin, Florence said to him genially:

"Surely you are some close relation to O'Neill? You resemble him strongly."

"I am his son," said Cormac.

"You are more welcome than ever," said Florence enthusiastically. "'Tis many years since he and I have met, but we were close companions once, and many a night have we slept wrapped in the one mantle." And he told Cormac some graphic stories of the Geraldine

War, in which the young O'Neill and the younger MacCarthy (destined in those days by the government to be Anglicising influences in their respective clans) had fought together on the Queen's side.

"And afterwards," he said, "we met often in Dublin and London; and, like the young hot-heads we were, planned how to drive the English altogether out of the country. Ah! 'twas a hopeful time. We are older now, but even yet I do not despair of accomplishing it. What thinks your father? His victories have proved his skill and the mettle of his men. Thinks he of peace or of extending the conflict?"

At the removal of the most difficult portion of his task from his shoulders by this frank declaration of Florence's Cormac was tremendously relieved.

"Your words would gladden O'Neill's heart could he but hear them," he said joyously. "For to this very purpose have I come to Munster. In a week's time . . ."

"Let us dismount here," said Florence hurriedly, "for the ground becomes very steep."

This was true. They had come to the foot of the Old Head of Kinsale, and the road became steeper and more rugged every yard. High up above them Cormac could see a strong-looking fort, to which Florence pointed, saying:

"See. There is one of the steps I have already taken for the achievement of our purpose. That castle used to be the property of old Lord de Courcy. As you shall see when we reach it, it commands the entrance to Kinsale Harbour, and for that reason I bought it. 'Twill serve well towards helping allies to land."

"Your forethought is most admirable," said Cormac. "As I was about to say, at the end of this week . . ."

"Your pardon," said Florence. "Let us tie the horses to this post, for the rest of the climb is exceeding steep."

They did so, and proceeded.

"We must think of everything," said Florence. "This fort has not been my only acquisition. I have bought some half dozen of the principal castles in Desmond, and when my lands are secured I shall be able to buy more. In ten

years' time I shall own all the strongest places in Munster, and then what a blow we shall strike!"

"In ten years' time?" cried Cormac aghast, standing and facing Florence in the narrow path. "Ten years! Why, in a week the truce is over."

"'Tis no harm. O'Neill's victories have been such that he can gain his own terms of peace, and then he can consolidate his power for the great effort."

"You do not understand," said Cormac. "My father took up arms at first not to overthrow the Queen, but to save Ulster from being made shireland and covered with the Queen's forts. The Queen will make peace on no other terms than these; and if we yield them Ulster becomes as helpless as Leinster and Munster are to-day."

"That is indeed so," said Florence pensively. "'Tis a hard problem we must face."

They had now reached the fort, and under the shadow of its walls, looking down on the not far-distant harbour it guarded, they stood in converse.

"Under your pardon, MacCarthy," said Cormac, "there is no problem that I can see. If we continue the war we may win or perish by the sword; if we surrender we die tamely in the strangle-hold. To a true man there is no choice."

"So it may seem to you, lad, that have but yourself to think of; but for me and for O'Neill, with lands and people under our charge, 'tis a different matter. Do not, therefore, ask me for an immediate answer. Give me a night to think upon it."

Cormac could only comply. He was completely charmed by Florence's frank and courteous manner, and he had to admit that his attitude, though it chafed his own impatient spirit, had reason in it. O'Sullivan Beare had told him things about Munster which he had not forgotten, and he felt sure that the wretched state of the province must weigh on Florence's mind. As for the suspions which evil reports about the chief had roused in him, they had vanished like a mist before the sun of his smile.

The sun had set and the wind blew colder round the

inhospitable fort. The two men accordingly returned to their horses and rode back to Kilbrittain. Florence, with deep apologies, craved Cormac's pardon for not inviting him to stay at the castle. He had for guest, he explained, a most villainous traitor, Miler MacGrath, whose suspicions would surely be aroused. Cormac, however, would find the inn quite comfortable.

The young man thereupon related the events of the night he had already spent there, to all of which Florence listened with great interest, saying that they had done wisely in going to his brother, and expressing concern for O'Cahan's recovery.

"He shall have the attendance of my own doctor at once," he said. "But you need have no fear of sleeping at the inn to-night, for Brother Miler is safe under my roof."

Cormac, however, preferred to spend the night as before in the woods.

The following mid-day he was in the beech grove as before, this time by direct appointment. He was not kept waiting for long, but the horseman who came to meet him was not Florence. It was a serving man, who handed him a letter and forthwith rode back to the castle. Sick with disappointment Cormac burst the seal and read as follows:

Sir—On a great urgency in my affairs I must away to England this morning, and therefore am constrained to forego our meeting and write to you instead. I have given much consideration to what we discussed together, and am thereby confirmed in my opinion that any action now taken would be premature and disastrous to the cause which I hold as dear as doth O'Neill himself. I would have you tell O'Neill that I hold it madness to fight at present, nor can I believe that he will continue in such folly. He is wise and learned and well knows the power of England. Poor as we are in money, small in numbers, unprovided with any but small-arms, how can we prevail against her? Let O'Neill be advised by me, and provide for the venture with the same forethought

as that by which I secured the fort on the Head of Kinsale, and then fortune may smile upon his arms, and I for one will be ready to join with him. I pray to the Lord Almighty so to direct him, and so take leave of you.

Your faithful and bounden,

Florence MacCarthy.

I charge you destroy this as soon as may be.

Florence and his smile were far away, so there was nothing to dispel the dark suspicions that came thronging into Cormac's mind as he read this epistle. "Fool! Fool! Fool!" he called himself over and over again. Then with a bitter curse he thrust the missive into his pocket and rode post-haste towards the valley of Dermot Moyle.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH IS TOLD "THE ILL NEWES OUT OF IRELAND."

O'Cahan sniffed with amusement when he read MacCarthy's letter.

"'Tis a very prince of diplomats," he said. "I wish I had been able to meet him."

"But are we not undone?" cried Cormac. "Is he not a traitor?"

"Not yet," said O'Cahan. "This is a man who will join no side till the battle has been won without him. See how frankly he tells us he is going to England. That is a masterpiece of wit. One who contemplated immediate treachery would never lay such suspicion upon himself."

"Perhaps," suggested Cormac, "it is for that very reason Florence does it, hoping that we will believe what you say."

"Likely enough," said O'Cahan, "were he dealing with common men; but he knows such a trick would not deceive O'Neill, and therefore I hold it bears the other interpretation. For if we win in the struggle that is before us he will want to show that he did not take this journey without our knowledge."

"Ugh!" gesticulated Cormac. "I like not these diplomatic ways."

"Then you shall be quit of them before long. To-morrow you must make all speed back to Ulster, and there acquaint O'Neill with all you have heard and seen. There are other things also which I have learnt, and which I beg you to mark now and relate to him."

Thereupon he gave the young man a brief account of the state of Munster as he had gathered it from Ross O'Farrell, Spenser, Donal, and Dermot MacCarthy, and his personal observations. Cormac listened intently, so also did Owen and Conn, who had been summoned for the purpose.

"O'Neill can expect nothing from this province," O'Cahan concluded, "until he comes here with a victorious army. That knowledge is the whole fruit of our mission. Let him use it as he thinks fit."

Dermot Moyle was thoroughly disappointed at Florence's behaviour, but he clung to the idea that he could ultimately be won to the national movement. Bidding the three young men god-speed next day, he told them to say that he for his part implored O'Neill to march into Munster as soon as might be, when the people, if not their leaders, would joyfully rush to arms. So leaving their comrade in the care of their kind hosts, the three set out for the North.

The truce had expired before their journey was accomplished, but they met with no mishap, and in due course arrived at the Ulster border. Here they learned that hostilities had already begun; that some of O'Neill's forces were besieging Armagh and Portmore, and that the main army was lying at Mullaghbane, between Armagh and Newry to cover both sieges. At this inspiring news the young men spurred forward with redoubled energy, as if fearing that the war might be ended before their arrival, and next day they rode into the camp at Mullaghbane. They were immediately escorted to the pavilion in its midst, over which flew the Red Hand of Tir-Owen. Within sat a big bearded man poring over a map and marking it occasionally with a pen. It was Hugh O'Neill.

Cormac forty years older; but this man has a capacious brow that has no counterpart in the younger man. His cold grey eyes, too, bear small resemblance to the merry blue ones of his son. Otherwise, under the changes wrought by time, the likeness is close. Here is the same high-bridged nose, the same fastidious mouth, the same

colouring, the same well-knit frame. Such is the man whom Elizabeth trained to win Ireland to her rule, and who learned his lesson so well that he has nearly succeeded in winning it to his own.

Affectionately he embraced his son, and then extended a hand of welcome to the others.

"But where is Art O'Cahan?" he asked at once, and so elicited an immediate account of the party's adventures. He listened with an expressionless face to the most thrilling episodes, and made no comment at the end, save to thank them all for their courage and fidelity. He then desired to be left alone, and the three accordingly went out to seek congenial company by the camp fires.

We shall not delay to describe the crowded events that followed. In the pages of history it is written large how Marshal Bagenal came marching with a proud and well-equipped host to the relief of beleagured Portmore, how he forced O'Neill to retire from Mullaghbane and raised the siege of Armagh, how the fiery O'Donnell came to the aid of his colleague with the clans of Tir-Connell and Connacht, how the Ulster army barred the way to Portmore, how the gallant Bagenal fell at the head of his men and the tawny tributary of the Blackwater was reddened with English blood.

The three men whose fortunes we have chosen to record bore themselves well on that hard-fought field. Conn MacSweeney commanded a division of the infantry that manned the great trench in front of the Irish position and bore the brunt of the fray. Owen O'Ruairc led the fierce counter-charge that restored the day when, after standing for more than an hour a storm of balls and bullet, the sorely-pressed front line began to give way before a determined onrush of the English. As for Cormac, he and his troop of O'Neill's own horse were held in leash all through the hottest fighting until the issue was no longer doubtful. Then at a word, with the fury of pent-up energy, he shot into the heart of the combat. Down on the retiring English infantry swept the cavalry of Tir-

Owen, sabring, spearing, trampling their foes to death. On they went, over the belching guns, hewing the gunners to pieces. The last English reserves broke and fled in panic before that crushing avalanche. Still on they rushed, slashing, yelling, blood-drunken, urging the rout. Then in a forlorn hope came Maelmora O'Reilly (traitor to his country but valiant as the best of her sons) with a troop of horse to rescue the stricken footmen. Into them crashed the men of Tir-Owen, and the two bodies of cavalry began furiously destroying each other. In the thick of the melée Cormac caught sight of the renegade and pricked fiercely towards him, hacking a red laneway through the press.

"Turn traitor," he yelled. "Turn, thou footstool of Jezabel."

"What? Is it thou, bastard?" answered Maelmora with a smile on his handsome face; and, cutting down an Ulster trooper, he made straight for the taunter. There was no room for sword-play. Maelmora dealt a sweeping blow at Cormac that laid open his cheek, but ere he could recover his guard Cormac had closed with him and driven his blade between his ribs.

At their leader's fall the cavalry also broke, and now the whole English army had become a panic-stricken mob with no purpose but escape. After them pressed the Irish, exultant, harrying and slaying, to the walls of Armagh. A veritable orgy of vengeance was theirs, and they took their fill of it; for only the oppressed know the full sweetness of foemen's blood.

"Come and dine with me in Dublin Castle!" said Cormac, like a second Mago, to the victorious general.

But O'Neill, like Hannibal, declined the invitation. With Munster supine and Leinster barely holding her own, an attack on the capital would have been, at best, hazardous. The English might be cowering behind their walls, but the walls themselves were sturdy and strong. O'Neill, with no artillery but the light field pieces just captured, was ill-equipped for a siege, and Ormond, the lord lieutenant, was in the vicinity of the city with an army as large as that which had just been overthrown.

So O'Neill wisely held back his victorious troops and contented himself with continuing the siege of Portmore and reinvesting Armagh. Both places surrendered a few days later, but the army made no further advance.

"Oh, why do we not march on Dublin?" said Cormac discontentedly, sitting on the side of Conn's bed in a temporary hospital in Armagh.

"We are waiting for your face to heal," said Conn. "We dare not show you to the Dublin girls in that plight."

"Faith, you're a bit of a mess yourself, Conn," retorted Cormac.

"Nay, there's no spoiling me," said Conn, who had been cut over the head, piked in the shoulder, and shot in the thigh.

"But oh! what victories we are letting slip," lamented Cormac, in whose nature there was much of the knight-errant. Conn, however, was a true soldier who took hard knocks cheerfully when they came his way, but much preferred ease to glory.

"Bah! thou fire-eater!" he said. "Have we not had our fill of victory? Are we northerns to adventure our bodies further for a pack of southern poltroons that kiss their chains? No, by my hilt. We'll keep a watch on the Blackwater and leave Jezabel her underlings."

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH MUNSTER AWAKES, AND A POET IS FACED WITH REALITY.

One morning, six weeks after the great battle, Cormac rode up to the hospital at Dungannon and found the almost recovered Conn sunning himself on the lawn before it.

"Well, old war-horse, how are the wounds?" he cried.

"Wounds!" answered Conn scornfully. "I know not what you mean by wounds. This on my head, what is it but a scratch? And this on my shoulder, what is it but a prick? As for my thigh, there's nothing in it, for the bullet went out as fast as it came in and left nothing but a hole behind. Yet this doctor here looks grave and says 'hum' and rubs his hands, and sends me to bed early, as if I were a girl sick of the measles."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Cormac, "for I have a right noble venture for you if you were but fit for it."

"Thunder and lightning!" cried Conn, starting to his feet. "That doctor shall call me well or I'll wring his neck for it. What's the venture?"

"We are to make another journey to the south," said Cormac.

Conn dropped back into his chair again with a groan of disappointment.

"If you have any more diplomacy afoot," he said, "you may rule me out of it. I am a soldier, and relish not these Munster trickeries."

"There is more than diplomacy in it this time," said Cormac. "You will march at the head of a troop of

horse, for Munster is awake at last and clamours for our help."

"Then am I a whole man," said Conn decisively, "if fifty doctors declared it otherwise."

"You will join me then on Monday," said Cormac, "with thirty of the best horsemen of your troop. We start from Monaghan at nine o'clock."

Conn having agreed, Cormac set off to find Owen O'Ruairc, who was still with the small field force maintained at Armagh.

That morning Cormac had been summoned to his father, and found the chief in a state of unusual elation. Munster, he learned, had been so heartened by the news of the Yellow Ford as to be ready for an immediate uprising if only the northern leader would send some forces to give the signal. O'Neill accordingly had resolved to send reinforcements to Tyrrell, and despatch him and O'More into Munster. Cormac was to command these reinforcements, and, in addition, was entrusted with two important diplomatic missions.

"First," O'Neill had said, "you shall go to James FitzThomas, nephew of the late Earl of Desmond, now living at Adare in Thomond, and give him this letter appointing him to his uncle's earldom and the leadership of Munster on condition that he hold both of them subject to me. If he refuse, as perhaps he may, being of a quiet disposition, then you shall offer the same to his brother John, who, I warrant, will jump at it."

Cormac put the letter in his sparrán.

"Then," said O'Neill, "you shall take this other letter to Florence MacCarthy and demand from him a straight answer, yes or no, whether he be with us or against us. If he say no, seek out Donal and give him this, which is our voice for his election to be MacCarthy Mór."

"Shall I not give it to him at once, father?" said Cormac. "To me he seems a better man than Florence, and he came straight to our side before ever Munster moved."

"I know it, lad," O'Neill answered. "But the gentlemen of Carbery will rather follow Florence than a brigand like Donal. Now God speed thee, my son. Pick

out the forty best men in your troop, and bid Conn MacSweeney and Owen O'Ruairc take thirty each. Then set off as soon as may be."

It was a brave cavalcade that rode out from Monaghan on Monday morning amid the cheers of the townspeople. They marched to a stirring tune played on the pipes, and the sun flashed from their spear-points and accoutrements. First came Cormac and his two lieutenants, all in saffron and wearing steel corselets. Behind them were the two pipers and a drummer. Then came Cormac's troop, which, being drawn from O'Neill's household cavalry, wore breastplates and carried broad sabres. Following them were the other two troops, without armour and equipped with lances. Ten mounted musketeers, added by O'Neill as an afterthought, brought up the rear.

The whole aspect of the country seemed to have changed since the great victory. When they arrived in Annaly they found it no longer desolate. Men were working in the fields, the cattle had been brought from their hiding places, even houses were being rebuilt. The two time-serving lords of the country had at last declared for the nation, and the Lord of Delvin, cooped up in his castle in Westmeath, was wondering whether starvation or English help would find him first. O'Farrell Bane kept a small regular force in the field, and Ross, thinking his work done, had retired once more to his books and papers —or to such of them as the destruction of war had left.

Taking twenty men as Annaly's contribution to the national army, Cormac proceeded on his way. Hurrying through Offaly he found Owny O'More master of the ruins of Portleise, and from him learned that Tyrrell was in Ormond, whither he had recently gone to intercept an English force marching from Dungarvan to Dublin. O'More read O'Neill's letter with delight, appointed his brother Rory to the command in Leix, and, taking three hundred foot and thirty horse, went forward with Cormac to look for Tyrrell.

"Ormond is now at Kilkenny," said O'More, "so I make no doubt Tyrrell will be in the vicinity." His surmise proved correct; they found the Ulster general en-

camped half way between Durrow and the Ossorian capital.

"There must be some witchcraft at work in the Queen's forces," said Tyrrell when he had greeted them. "Over there," pointing to the distant spires of Kilkenny, "Ormond has four thousand foot and five hundred horse, with I know not what power of ordnance; yet he holds them within the walls rather than take the field against my two thousand, with nothing but the single piece we took from Barnewall at Mullingar, and for that we have no ammunition."

"Perhaps Ormond does not know that," suggested Cormac.

Tyrrell smote his thigh, and vowed with a hoarse laugh that he would send a messenger to tell him.

"No; there is better game afoot," said Cormac, and showed him O'Neill's letter.

Cormac and O'More stayed with Tyrrell that night, and next morning the whole army, consisting now of over two thousand foot and three hundred and fifty horse, arose an hour before dawn, to avoid Ormond's observation, and marched into Thomond.

The sight of the Red Right Hand and the saffron-kilted warriors of the north acted like a very elixir upon the downtrodden spirits of the men of Munster. From all sides they came flocking to Tyrrell's banner armed with anything they could pick up—scythes, pitchforks, axes, cudgels—so that eventually that stern disciplinarian found his column becoming disorganised and unmanageable, which compelled him to call a halt and break up the new recruits into companies under the charge of Ulster sergeants. Soon it became evident that news of their coming had gone before them, for as they entered Desmond they overtook crowds of dispossessed English settlers with loads of household goods on their backs straggling despondently southward. Here and there too an undertaker's house might be seen in flames; and everywhere bands of exultant Irish, men women and children, were making their way with song and joyful laughter back to their ancient homes.

As evening fell on the third day of their advance Cormac spied a light among the trees ahead.

"Why, that must be Kilcolman Castle," he said to Owen. "Do you remember? Where your friend the robber-poet lives."

As he spoke a tongue of flame shot up above the tree tops, and the taint of smoke became noticeable in the air. Then there was a sound of distant cheering. Cormac and Owen spurred forward, passed through the gate of the demesne and dashed up to the house. As they reached it flames came bursting out of every window, and thunderous sounds told of the collapse of roof and floors. Kilcolman Castle had become a vast furnace, in whose red glare danced and yelled the maddened peasantry who had borne so long the tyranny for which it stood.

Also in the glare stood Spenser himself and his wife and four children beside a little heap of hastily collected goods. It speaks well for the character of our race that of all that triumphant mob whose extermination he had advocated and on whose misery he had thriven, not one offered him personal injury or insulted him in his downfall. After watching the conflagration for a short time, he turned away, shouldered some of the burden at his feet, and along with his family passed from the scene for ever—to die six months later in his native land "for lack of bread." Such was the last of one who, if he had a strange conception of justice in life, in his death affords the only sign in our history that there is justice in heaven.

That night the Ulster army encamped in Kilcolman demesne, and moved next day towards Mallow, where, they had learned, Sir Thomas Norrys lay with a force not inferior to their own. But the Lord President of Munster did not await their onset. Striking camp before dawn, he fell back so rapidly to Cork that the Ulster cavalry had to content itself with killing a few of his rearguard.

"I thought you promised me a fight," said Conn disgustedly to Cormac. "I suppose now the diplomacy will begin again."

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH AN EARL IS MADE OUT OF STRAW.

Within a week of Tyrrell's entry into Munster the whole province, with the exception of three or four castles, the City of Cork, and a few small towns, was in Irish hands. It was now time for Cormac to fulfil his first mission, so leaving his regiment in charge of Conn MacSweeney, he set out with Owen for Adare.

James FitzThomas FitzGerald proved to be a quiet, middle-sized, middle-aged man, with mild blue eyes, straw-coloured hair, and a helpless way of moving his hands when—as happened very often—he found a difficulty in expressing himself. He said "my goodness" on first reading O'Neill's letter, then read it again and yet again with troubled face and wrinkled brow.

"Gentlemen," he said at length, "this offer does me great honour. You know, of course, that I am of right the true Earl of Desmond, my father having been the eldest son and the late attainted earl a usurper. I can demonstrate, on showing unimpeachable . . ."

But here the excellent James was interrupted by his brother John, a dark, sturdy, bullet-headed man, with brusque unceremonious manners—a Geraldine of the true breed.

"Nobody minds the family tree, James," he said. "Take the earldom because you can get it, or leave it alone."

"If it were not my own by right I would not touch it," said James reprovingly. "But, gentlemen, as it is mine, and as O'Neill brings the might to support my right, I accept it."

"Kneel then, James Fitzthomas," said Cormac, standing up and drawing his sword.

James complied.

"In O'Neill's name, I dub thee Earl of Desmond," said Cormac, giving him the accolade.

"I'll be the first vassal to pay you homage," said John, crooking an unceremonious knee to his brother. "And now what's to be done?"

The crisp question was a fitting end to that brief investiture. The four men sat down immediately to a discussion of the prospects of the war, wherein it soon appeared that the newly-created earl had no great attachment to the principle of nationality—in fact, no real understanding of it. His kind heart, however, was moved by the suffering he had seen all round him under the oppressive rule of England, and for that reason he favoured the prosecution of the fight.

"I have seen so many bad examples," said he "of divers many gentlemen, by bloodily false and sinister accusations, cut off and executed to death that the noblemen and gentlemen of this province cannot even think themselves assured of their lives if they were contented to lose their lands and livings; as, for example, Redmond FitzGerald, upon the false accusation of a scurfey boy for safeguard of his life, was put to death, being a gentleman of good calling, three score years of age, and innocent of the crime charged withal. Donogh MacCraghe also was executed upon the false information of a villainous kern, who, within a sennight being put to death, took upon his salvation that all he said against Donogh was untrue, that he was suborned by others. And of late a poor cousin of ours . . ."

"A truce to these instances," interrupted John again. "Why, James, if you are going to recount every injustice wrought by the English in Munster we shall be here till Doomsday. Let us think less of our wrongs and more of our rights, and so by winning our rights we shall right our wrongs and get all done with as few words as may be."

They turned to practical matters after that harangue (which mightily pleased the Ulstermen though it irritated the verbose James), and arrangements were made to

acquaint all the scattered Geraldines of the appointment of the new head to their house. Cormac and Owen then took their leave and rode back to the army.

"I wish," said Cormac on the way, "that the Earldom of Desmond went by tanistry. I am afraid James Fitz-Thomas is not an earl we can show to the soldiers."

The next day Cormac set out for Carbery. He took with him his own troop of dragoons, partly as a protection in case he should encounter any of the forces from Cork, but principally in order to overawe Florence; also perhaps with the boyish idea of showing off his power where he had once been so shamed and outwitted. Riding south all day he billetted his troops for the night in Kilbrittain village, and next morning came jingling at their head up to the very gate of the castle. The men halted on the green sward, while he himself, attended by two orderlies, was admitted to the courtyard.

He asked at once for Florence, and was told that he was away.

"Tell him," said Cormac, "that I bear a message from Hugh O'Neill."

"If you bore a message from the Pope of Rome," said the hall porter, "you could not deliver it to MacCarthy to-day. He went to London four months ago, and we know not when he will return."

Had the sallow steward been his informant Cormac would not have believed him, but the hall porter was a bluff honest-looking fellow and spoke convincingly. Besides his arrival must have been too unexpected to allow of the preparation of any deception.

"Would you like to see her ladyship?" pursued the porter; but Cormac, blushing up to his hair, hastily answered that he would not trouble her. He immediately took his departure and rode back with his troop to Kilbrittain.

On the whole, he did not regret Florence's absence, for it left him with no choice but to confer the chieftaincy of Carbery on the man whom he himself favoured. But where was Donal? No information on that point was to be had at Kilbrittain, and it was hardly likely that he

would still be found in the wilds he had inhabited as an outlaw. His whereabouts might be learned from Dermot Moyle, and Cormac was also anxious to see O'Cahan again, so, leaving his men at Kilbrittain, he rode over in the afternoon to the valley that had been so hospitable a refuge. He found the Lady Aileen alone in the house, and she had stirring news to tell. When Tyrrell and his troops had burst into Desmond, the clansmen of Carbery, left without a chief by Florence's vacillation and by the adhesion of MacCarthy Reagh to the Queen, had come clamouring to Dermot to lead them into action in the national cause.

"Ah, the brave people!" said Lady Aileen. "I sometimes think we have much to learn from these lowly ones. While our nobility are wrangling over some paltry title or some few acres of land, or hesitating and calculating which side to join, how loyally they come forward with no thought for themselves to fight for faith and fatherland! And if the war go badly 'tis they that will suffer for it too, whilst our haughty chieftains will come begging on bended knee for forgiveness."

Cormac was not too pleased at this democratic utterance, for though there were a good many of the forms of republicanism in the system of clan government, the Irish nobility were both stern and proud. Lady Aileen, however, unaware of his humour, went on to tell how her husband and Art O'Cahan had led a fine body of fighting men into Kerry to attack the Castle of Molahiff, so long the subject of litigation between Florence and the Brownes. She had other news for him too. Donal the bastard had formally applied to O'Sullivan Mór for the white rod, and had been curtly refused. He had thereupon hired for himself a body of seven hundred Connaught mercenaries to secure his claims, and with these had joined Dermot in the siege of Molahiff.

The joyful prospect of partaking in another fight sent Cormac back in breathless haste to Kilbrittain, whence, guided by a man of the country, he set off with his troop next morning for the beleagured fortress.

All was quiet when he reached it. The castle stood

grim and silent by the side of a dreary lake. Not a man showed himself on its walls, no shot came from its many loop-holes. The only sign of life it showed was the flag of England flapping defiance from the keep. The besiegers were also in repose. As Cormac rode down from the high ground he could see their lines bivouacked in three distinct divisions. A little further on he came upon one of their patrols, was challenged and recognised, and was forthwith directed to the most easterly division as that of Dermot Moyle. In a few minutes he was shaking hands with Dermot and O'Cahan, while the troops of Tir-Owen and Carbery were heartily fraternising.

Cormac was now conducted by his two friends to a large hut built with wattles a little in rear of the line of bivouacs. Inside a young man lay on a heap of rugs so busily engaged in writing that he did not look up when the others entered.

"What, Philip?" cried Dermot. "Still scribbling, lad? Up and welcome one of the victors of the Yellow Ford." The youth was already on his feet. "This is Philip O'Sullivan, Cormac," went on Dermot, "nephew to O'Sullivan Beare. And this, Philip, is Cormac, son of Hugh O'Neill."

As the two young men shook hands Dermot asked:

"What is the scribbling about, Philip?"

"Oh," said Philip, a dark, solemn-faced youth with the same Spanish cast of feature as his uncle, "'tis but a poor jotting of yesterday's doings that may serve to help my memory if ever I write a history of these wars."

"What?" asked Cormac. "Have you made an assault already?"

"Marry, yes," said Dermot. "Tell him about it, Philip. Thy tongue has more descriptive power than mine."

Philip launched forthwith into a rapturous description of the contest. He told how such storms of shot had swept against window and battlement that no defender could stand thereat, yet how from every possible cleft and loophole a hot fire had been directed upon the assailants, so that more than a hundred of them had perished.

"And there was one man," he said, "that held post at a loophole commanding the gateway, and so wonderful was his aim that all who durst approach it were slain. Sixteen men fell to his musket alone, and such terror did he inspire that our men withdrew from the assault."

"Shame!" cried Cormac.

"Nay," said Dermot. "We can ill spare so many good lives, and Philip here has thought of a plan whereby the place may be safely taken."

"No, not I," said Philip. "I was minded of it by reading of the *testudines* of the ancient Romans, which they constructed by linking their shields together, and under the shelter thereof did shatter the walls opposed to them. Come now and you shall see the *testudo* which our men are making."

They went out, and, coming to a shrubbery which screened the process from enemy eyes, they found a party of men engaged in building a kind of pent-house with a very thick roof strengthened with iron hoops; one end was open, the other removable, and the whole was mounted on small solid wheels. Two of these engines were already finished and two more were in course of construction.

Philip explained their use as they returned to the hut. Then they had supper, during which Cormac told them of his new mission. Dermot declared himself resigned to the inevitable, saying that Florence had only himself to blame for being superseded.

"All the same," he said, "I fear the gentlemen of Carbery will not follow Donal, though he is the very idol of the common folk."

O'Cahan, however, showed himself not at all pleased, and swore that, had he been by, O'Neill had never made such a choice.

"And if," said he, "you have come to bestow the title, 'twill save complications if you postpone the ceremony till we have taken the castle."

"Why?" asked Cormac.

"You saw," said O'Cahan, "that our camp is divided into three portions. One of them is that of Dermot MacCarthy of Dowalla. From my short acquaintance with the man I cannot believe he is in the field for purely disinterested motives; and I'll wager all I have that he seeks by rivalling Donal's achievements to put forth another claim for the white rod of MacCarthy Mór."

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH TEN YEARS' LITIGATION IS SETTLED IN A DAY.

In the cold greyness of the morning the Irish forces drew themselves up for the assault. On the left was the lord of Dowalla with fifty of those Carbery gentlemen who scorned a brigand leader, and a hundred other followers. In the centre was Donal with forty of his old robber band and a hundred of his hired Connaught men. On the right was Dermot Moyle with two hundred of the MacCarthy clansmen. Philip O'Sullivan, carrying a note book in his belt instead of a pistol, was with him as his lieutenant, and stood, all observant, taking in every detail of the scene with those alert eyes of his. On the extreme flank were the dismounted Ulstermen under Cormac and O'Cahan.

At a given signal the four *testudines* were run forward, with the removable wall facing towards the castle. Two men with picks, a man with explosives, and four others formed the crew of each. The last named four pushed the clumsy contrivance forward from within, the others walking slowly in its shelter. With each went a party of skirmishers to protect it from any sally that the garrison might make.

As soon as the clumsy engines came within range a heavy fire was opened on them from the castle. Bullets came rattling on their sides and roofs, burying themselves in the woodwork or ricochetting off. Several of the skirmishers were hit, but the remainder replied to the fire vigorously and so effectively that the accuracy of the unseen marksmen's aim was much diminished. The cham-

pion in the gate turret, however, still continued his deadly work. All the skirmishers round one of the pent-houses were laid low, and finally the engine itself was brought to a standstill by a lucky shot that penetrated to the interior and killed one of the crew.

At that Cormac caught up a musket from the nearest man, rushed forward to the crippled engine, and, dropping on his knee in its shelter, took careful aim at a very narrow slit, and fired. A bullet ripped his sleeve in reply. Darting into cover again he reloaded quickly and took aim once more. Something snicked the silver clasp on his left shoulder, but steadying himself he pressed the trigger. No shot came back in answer, and soon, by the slower falling of their men, the Irish guessed that their deadliest opponent was no more.

And now the three surviving *testudines* had reached the castle wall; the backs were slid out; the picks did their work; the explosives were laid; and the crews came running back at top speed to their lines. Three dropped on the way, but the remainder arrived safely.

Philip, who had been all this while scribbling hard, now shut his note-book, thrust it into his belt, and drew his sword. An instant later, with a succession of ear-splitting thunder-claps, the wall of the castle was riven from top to bottom, in one place collapsing into a heap of shattered rubble. Then, with a mighty cheer, the Irish rushed at the gap, each contingent racing to be the first to enter. The winners of the contest were Dermot Moyle's men, who were nearest to the breach. Up the mound of debris they scrambled, meeting with no opposition, and, thinking the castle theirs, surged into the courtyard with victorious shouts. But their triumph was premature. Down on their heads came slates and flagstones, pelted on them from the roof of the keep. A dozen men were stretched on the ground at once, and the remainder, their exultation changed to panic, hastily backed towards the breach. But there they were met by the oncoming flood of Donal's men and carried forward again. For a moment the foe had run short of missiles, and the assailants, rushing round the courtyard, found

the main doorway. Undaunted by a volley fired from within, they rained blows upon the stout oak panels with muskets, swords and spears. Then a man armed with an axe came charging forward, and with three mighty strokes shivered the door in pieces. Down it went, and like a dammed torrent the roaring mass of men burst into the hall. There was no stopping them. A few resolute defenders holding the stairway were hewn in pieces. Then through turret and corridor the remainder were chased, hunted down and killed like rats in the corners where they turned at bay. Out on to the roof came the victors, and the banner of England was hauled down and torn into rags. Then the carnage was fittingly ended by the hanging of three of the garrison who had surrendered—poor vengeance for the hundreds of "loose kerne" who had been so treated through a bitter half century.

Cormac was not in at the death, though he had been one of the first in the breach.

"I like not this butchery," he said, turning to Philip at his side.

"Nor I," said Philip. "Let us go."

They elbowed their way through the throng accordingly, and came out on to the lawn, where Philip plucked a dock-leaf and began carefully wiping the blood off his sword. Then he sheathed it.

"War," said he, "is in itself an exact and cunning art. Is it not a pity that it should be fouled by such gross accompaniments? 'Tis a most worthy study, requiring as accurate computations as the subtlest problems of mathematics, and a sum of the knowledge of geographer, astronomer and philosopher, yet its conclusion may be as incalculable as the fall of the dice," and, taking his notebook from his belt, he stretched himself on the grass and began to write. Cormac sat down beside him, mopping his brow.

"I shall be counted the world's greatest historian," said Philip, looking up from his work after a few minutes. "Homer wrote from hearsay, Thucydides in retirement, Tacitus I know not how, but I'm sure he lies. I am the first to describe a battle when the dead were still warm,

the wounded still groaning, and my own sword still reeking." He scribbled a little more, then paused and said: "I pray you, Cormac, how many men were there in this garrison?"

"Nay, I know not," said Cormac. "You had best go and count their corpses."

The undisciplined Munstermen were now engaged in sacking the captured fortress, and already fierce quarrels were breaking out over the division of the spoil. Cormac immediately became concerned for the morale of his own men, so, forcing his way back into the castle through the outcoming throngs of plunder-laden kerns, he called in stentorian tones to the Ulstermen to fall in on the lawn. They were disciplined troops and obeyed without question, though there were black looks from some of them who had failed to secure any spoil, and had to endure the ordeal of standing to attention while those Munster irregulars reaped the fruit of the battle. It was fortunate that Cormac took this precaution, for scarcely had he got his thirty-nine men (one had fallen in the fight) reorganised and remounted, when, looking towards the castle, he saw the commencement of an ugly scuffle among the Munstermen in the very breach they had so gallantly won.

Donal the bastard and Dermot of Dowalla had also begun to think it necessary to restore discipline among their men, and in the course of their efforts to that end had suddenly found themselves face to face on the summit of that blood-stained heap of shattered masonry. For a moment the rival chiefs glared at each other in silence. Then Donal spoke.

"My Lord of Dowalla," he said, "it is time you restrained your men from pillaging my castle."

"Thy castle!" exclaimed the other, a thick-set, red-faced, choleric man, with a moustache like a viking's. "Thy castle! Why, thou bastard brigand, I have a good mind to hang thee from yonder battlement for having dared to set foot in it."

Donal's face went white with wrath.

"Have a care, sir," he said, "how you address MacCarthy Mór. Take back those words or by the lord I'll serve you as you threatened me."

"I take back nothing," answered Dermot of Dowalla. "Bastard thou art and brigand thou art, and thou shalt hang twice as high for daring to usurp the name of MacCarthy Mór."

There was an angry growl from the followers of both sides who had begun to gather round their chieftains. Donal's men were somewhat in the majority, and at a word some of them stepped forward to lay hands on his rival. Instantly Dermot's men came to the defence of their chief. Swords were drawn, and blood would surely have been shed, when the brawlers were startled by a shout from behind. Cormac and his Ulstermen had come charging up to the breach, scattering their allies with blows of the flats of their swords.

"Cease!" cried Cormac. "Drop your weapons. Who raises his hand against a brother Irishman dies by this sword."

The rival clansmen paused and looked inquiringly at their chiefs. Donal waved his hat to the young dictator, and said:

"Welcome, Cormac, welcome. What word from Hugh O'Neill?"

At sound of that name the lord of Dowalla started. The clansmen had dropped their quarrel as if by mutual consent, and all eyes were now turned upon the Ulsterman.

"You shall hear his word in due course," said Cormac. "First send these men to their ranks—and do you too send yours, my Lord of Dowalla. Then attend me, both of you, at the tent of Dermot Moyle."

The Lord of Dowalla came forward.

"And who art thou," he demanded, "to speak so imperiously to men of rank?"

Cormac raised his head proudly, saying:

"I am Cormac son of Hugh O'Neill, conqueror of the English, soon to be King of all Ireland."

The Lord of Dowalla bowed.

"Then let O'Neill see justice done," he said. "I am by right and power MacCarthy Mór, and this brigand here . . ."

"Brigand in thy teeth, traitor," interrupted Donal. "I have spent my life fighting my country's foes whilst thou lay tamely submissive to them. Listen to me, sir . . ."

"No more," said Cormac peremptorily. "I will not hear another word. You too, my lord of Dowalla, you must bide your time. Dismiss your men and then come to my tent."

The two rivals bowed, and went to issue their orders. Their men were rapidly mobilised, and in a short space the wrecked fortress stood empty and desolate.

"'Twas rarely done," said O'Cahan approvingly to Cormac as they made their way back to the tent together. "Yet 'tis a poor choice we have to make. We had best keep our men under arms lest the decision provoke fur-their rioting."

Donal was the first of the contestants to appear before Cormac. His whole manner denoted the extremity of self-satisfaction and an entire confidence in the coming decision. He had been at some pains to comb and brush some of the brigand out of his appearance, but his hair had proved untameable, and the trimming of his beard had shorn him of much of his wild majesty and substituted a bourgeois smugness. A smile, which he seemed unable to shake off, threw into flashing prominence a set of gigantic yellow tusks.

"Your humble servant, gentlemen," he said, with a sweeping bow (newly acquired). "I am very sorry I forgot myself just now; but to be called brigand by a rascally Queen's MacCarthy did mightily enrage me. What says O'Neill?"

"That shall presently appear," said O'Cahan coldly; and at that Donal's smile vanished, and he flushed under his weather-beaten complexion. He stood awkward and uneasy under the gaze of four pairs of eyes, and was immensely relieved by the immediate advent of his rival, who strode into the tent with a very determined air.

"Well, my Lord of Dowalla," said Cormac, "what is your grievance?"

"My grievance!" cried the choleric chieftain. "My grievance is that the honourable title of MacCarthy Mór, that is by law at the disposal of the nobility and gentry of Desmond, has been usurped these many months by that bastard brigand there——"

"My lord," interrupted Cormac, "I cannot hear you if you be not more courteous in your speech."

"By that *gentleman* then," said the Lord of Dowalla with unnecessary emphasis. "In that usurpation he has been aided by you of Ulster, unwitting, I make no doubt, that there were better claims afoot. Now my claim is founded not on base descent from a former holder, nor yet on the rights of a wife, but on the dignity and pre-eminence of my name, on the high position I hold among the nobility of Carbery, and upon the valorous deeds I have performed this day at the intaking of Molahiff."

"Prithee, my Lord of Dowalla," said Philip, looking up from his note-book, "repeat me the last part of that speech that I may properly record it."

"Peace, Philip," warned Cormac, as the Lord of Dowalla glared. "My lord, your claim sounds well to me, but I fear the issue is already decided," and he held out O'Neill's letter to Donal.

Donal's ill-humour vanished on the instant. He seized the letter, tore it open, and devoured its contents with ravenous eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am O'Neill's servant ever. He shall not repent his choice."

The Lord of Dowalla sneered contemptuously.

"O'Neill may command Ulster," he said, "but he cannot command the White Rod, nor yet the nobility and gentry of Carbery. I leave you, gentlemen, you and your bastard MacCarthy." And in a blazing fury he strode from the tent.

A few minutes later he rode away, taking all his following with him, except a few poor kern who preferred

to remain in the field with their countrymen. As for Donal, he swaggered off to his brigands and bonnachts with the good news, and in a brief while Cormac, looking out of the tent, saw the banner of MacCarthy Mór flying from the keep of Molahiff.

"I had intended a better flag for it," said Dermot Moyle gloomily. "But 'tis a flag for which few men seem to care." And going to a corner of the tent he brought forth a bundle, unrolled it, and shook out before them all the golden sunburst of Ireland.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MUNSTER GIRDS ITSELF FOR BATTLE.

The Castle of Molahiff was about the last stronghold to fall into Irish hands. Nothing soon remained of the English except the three towns of Cork, Kinsale and Kilmallock. And now, at O'Cahan's suggestion, the Earl of Desmond called together the various leaders to concert a plan of action for the future. To his camp at Carrigrone Castle—recently captured from the enemy—they foregathered accordingly. First the Geraldines, his immediate kinsmen and vassals: the Knight of Kerry, the White Knight, the Knight of the Valley, FitzMaurice of Lixnaw, and others, each with his following. Then Doctor MacCraghe, Bishop of Cork, and Pierce Lacy of Limerick, with a small band. Then the O'Driscolls, O'Donovans, O'Sullivans, and other chiefs with their clansmen. Finally came Donal MacCarthy with his formidable body of Connaught mercenaries in lieu of the disdainful gentlemen of his sept, who mostly held aloof, though a few came in under the leadership of Dermot Moyle.

There was a noticeable tendency amongst all these great folk to avoid the propinquity of Donal, who, wherever he moved, stood prominently alone. There was a look of hardly suppressed wrath on his face which was in strong contrast to the expression of serene indifference with which O'Sullivan Mór looked over, round, or through him whenever their eyes chanced to meet.

The council was held in the great oak-panelled dining-hall of the castle. The Earl took the chair at the head of a long table in the centre of the room. The other chief-

tains took their seats along its sides, and again there was a general edging away from Donal, who would have been left with an empty chair on each side of him had not Dermot Moyle tactfully taken one of them.

A long discussion followed, which, if it came to no definite conclusion, at least gave the Ulstermen present a true estimate of the capacities and principles of these Munster leaders. It was evident from the start that the bulk of them thought far more of the defence of their own territories than of the general cause; and as to the cause itself, there were almost as many ideas of it as there were men in the room. The common belief seemed to be that O'Neill would win another victory, and that then the Queen would grant a general "pardon," with religious and other concessions. There was no difficulty in counting the few who regarded the struggle in its true light as a war of independence to be fought to a finish.

Pierce Lacy was amongst these; so was Bishop MacCraghe; so were Dermot Moyle and the Knight of the Valley and John FitzThomas; all of whom supported the Earl's declaration that the full force of Munster should be mobilised at once and attacks made on the three cities still left to the Queen. This bold plan was mightily disconcerting to the lukewarm. They did not want to inflict too heavy a defeat on the Queen lest her wrath should become implacable. "Pardon" they knew came more readily to a rebel who had the tact not to win too thoroughly. There were other objections too. The White Knight—a rat-faced man, with wispy hair, scanty beard, and a pair of searching, covetous eyes—asked what would become of his Castle of Kilmeheny if he sent all his followers to besiege Cork, and so loosed a score of questions of the same tenour. Then O'Sullivan Mór declared that he could not possibly take any such decisive step without the command of an acknowledged MacCarthy Mór.

"*I* am MacCarthy Mór!" cried Donal, starting to his feet.

"Down with him!" yelled the assembled gentry of Desmond, and a scene of fierce recrimination began, while the Earl, in great distress, sat helplessly waving his

hands at the head of the table, and the Ulstermen looked at one another in despair. At length Donal, shouting in stentorian tones, appealed to O'Cahan.

The latter, as O'Neill's ambassador, sat on the earl's right hand. Hitherto he had discreetly held his peace, but now all eyes were turned on him, so there was nothing for it but to speak.

"My lords and gentlemen," he said, rising in his place. "This is no time to wrangle over titles. O'Neill has no desire to diminish the rights and privileges of the giver of the rod, but as the acclaimed leader of the Irish nation, as the deliverer whom you yourselves invited to your assistance, he expects that the leaders whom he appoints shall be obeyed. You may deny Donal to be MacCarthy Mór; you cannot deny him to be O'Neill's general in Desmond. As for the other question which you have so long debated, let me remind you that this very week an English army of twenty thousand men has landed in Dublin, and you will scarce keep that out of Munster by scattering your forces and guarding your castles. But if you gather together into a strong army, with the help we have brought you from Ulster, you shall win such another victory as the Yellow Ford, and send this Essex skipping home to his royal mistress."

This speech should have carried the day, and indeed many waverers were visibly struck by its wisdom; but immediately the White Knight rose and pointed out that it was well known that Essex had proclaimed that he would waste no time on minor expeditions, but would grapple straightway with O'Neill in the north.

"And then," said he, "our army will do nothing but eat and rest at our expense while Essex and Ormond send forth flying parties to ravage our lands and homes in our absence."

This sophistry, so well suited to the general inclination, carried the day. The Earl, unworthy scion of a stubborn house, was not the man to jeopardise his position by issuing unpopular commands to vassals whose fealty was so dubious. After a little further wrangling it was agreed that the various forces should depart to their own terri-

tories, the leaders promising to mobilise them again, if summoned, to resist invasion on a large scale. Then the conference broke up.

"What could I *do*?" the earl afterwards asked of O'Cahan and Tyrrell in his usual plaintive way. "I was but a simple gentleman three months ago. These proud kinsmen of mine are not used to regarding me as their lord."

"We must do the best with what there is," said Tyrrell. "These men of yours are fine material. I warrant that with hard training I'll make soldiers of them in no long time. Then Donal will surely stay with us, and his troops are in excellent condition. With these and our own men and such following as Dermot Moyle has we'll make an army that will give Essex pause if he venture near us. Come, we'll begin at once."

A month later, while the army was still undergoing its training, O'Cahan and his three friends, with Tyrrell, Dermot O'Connor and Owny O'More, were assembled for a convivial evening in a room at Carrigrone Castle. They sat in a circle round a bright log fire enjoying tankards of the good brown ale which her Majesty's garrison had left behind in the cellars.

"I am heartily sick of the Sugaun Earl," said Tyrrell after a pause in the conversation.

"And I," said Dermot O'Connor.

"And I," said Conn and Cormac together.

"The Sugaun Earl?" queried O'Cahan.

"'Tis a name the soldiers have given the good James FitzThomas," Tyrrell explained. "They love him, but they know him for a fool. If one of them gets a fit of laziness he has but to tell the Earl he has a pain in his stomach, and the kind-hearted fellow sends him to bed for a week. He is more like a wet-nurse to those men than a general."

"I like the Earl," said Owen, "for he is the only honest man in Munster."

"Talking of honest men," said O'Cahan, "Florence MacCarthy is returning to Ireland."

Various exclamations greeted this piece of news.

"I have it from Dermot Moyle," said O'Cahan, "who has it from the Lady Ellen. He leaves England within a week."

"Devil sink his ship!" muttered Conn.

"Unholy wish!" said Dermot O'Connor. "I would sooner have an able trickster to lead this province than an honest fool like the Earl. He is more of a kind with them for one thing; and what is honesty, anyway, but a lack of ability to prevent other men deceiving you?"

"O vile sophist!" cried Owen O'Ruairc in hot indignation. "Such opinions mark a man as . . ."

But the rest of his speech was lost, for at this moment the door of the room was burst open and a young man came rushing in in a state of great excitement.

"Is Owny O'More here?" he asked.

"Why, cousin, is it you?" cried Owny, springing to his feet.

"I have searched Munster for you," said the youth.

"Well, you have me now," said Owny. "Gentlemen, this is my cousin, Hugh O'Dempsey," and he introduced each of the company in turn. "And what's the news, Hugh?" he asked at length.

"Rory has sent me to tell you," said the young man, "that Essex is not going to march north, but is preparing to start for the south, and already some of his cavalry have been scouting in Leix."

The younger members of the party were about to break into cheers at this pleasing news, but the countenances of Tyrrell and O'More forbade it.

"We must take action at once," said Tyrrell gravely. "Gentlemen, you will excuse me. O'Dempsey, you will remain here till further orders. O'More, let us go seek Donal and the Earl."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH HER MAJESTY HEARS MORE ILL NEWS OUT OF IRELAND.

The next few days were all alarums and excursions. O'More at once marched off with his men to Leix in order to make Essex's passage through that country as difficult as possible, and couriers were sent flying all over Munster to rally the earl's followers. The Geraldine lords, however, were slow in answering the call to arms, and at the end of a week only the Knight of the Valley, Fitzmaurice of Lixnaw, and a few minor contingents had marched in. Meanwhile the Ulstermen and Donal chafed impatiently at Carrigrone, in no way mollified by the Earl's apologies for his vassals.

The need of haste was urgent. Essex, they learned, was advancing rapidly. O'More, with his sword of hate, made him pay dearly for every mile of his progress, and in one well-laid ambush played such havoc with him that the scene of it was white with the shorn plumes of England's chivalry. But the newly risen power of Leix was not strong enough to inflict any decisive check on so great a host, and in half the expected time Essex had cut his way deep into eastern Thomond, and pressed on boldly, never pausing till he came to the Castle of Cahir, to which he laid siege.

And still but half the Earl of Desmond's forces had assembled. It would be necessary to act promptly if Cahir were not to be lost, so Tyrell and Donal came to a rapid decision. They would march north at once with

their own contingent, and by touch and run tactics hamper the investment until the Earl should be strong enough to advance and give battle. The latter agreed, and sent off further urgent messages to his tardy supporters, while his colleagues rushed to the post of danger.

For several days they harried the besieging army, and many a heroic deed was done in that warfare of posts and surprises. But the enemy was too strong to be turned from his purpose, and the attack on the castle was sternly pressed. At last, however, came a messenger from the south to say that Desmond was ready. Some of his cavalry had already reached Cahir and the infantry were marching north in hot haste. The delay was due to the White Knight, who, with his considerable contingent of four hundred foot and fifty horse, had been the last to obey his lord's summons.

This welcome news came not a moment too soon. Cahir Castle, held by a lukewarm Anglo-Irish lord, surrendered that very day, Essex resumed his march next morning, and Donal and Tyrrell fell back before him to a position chosen by the latter in front of the little town of Croom.

"March to the firing on the east of Croom," was Tyrrell's message to the earl, "and we'll catch Essex in a trap from which not a man shall escape."

That night the little army bivouacked on the position it was to hold. The tactical features of the ground were simple. A mile to the east of Croom was a ridge six hundred yards in length, running due north and south, crossed at its middle, where there was a slight dip, by the road. At its northern end was a dense and extensive wood; at its southern a farm and outbuildings on the bank of the little river Camoge. Thus each flank was well protected. It was not a position which could be held indefinitely, but with substantial help at hand it was safe enough. Tyrrell's plan was simply to cling on to the ridge long enough to give time to Desmond to come up with crushing force on the enemy's left flank.

The next morning was bright, with showery intervals —a typical April day. Tyrrell had courteously resigned

the chief command to Donal, partly as an object lesson to the egotistical Munster chieftains, and partly to gratify that leader himself. From a slight eminence behind the lines the two generals surveyed their position. Along the ridge to the left of the road stood the Ulstermen, seventeen hundred strong, their flank resting on the wood, which swarmed with their skirmishers. Behind this wood Cormac was posted with his three troops of Ulster cavalry and the 300 horsemen sent forward by the Earl. To the right of the road were the forces of Desmond, consisting of Donal's seven hundred mercenaries and his little band of ex-brigands, of three hundred of the Clan Carthy under Dermot Moyle, and of fifty men sent by O'Sullivan Beare under his nephew Philip. This flank was protected by the farm buildings already mentioned, which were now being loop-holed and strengthened, and by a double bend of the river. In rear of this end of the line was the remainder of the cavalry, in number about two hundred.

Such was the position and such the forces that lay beneath the generals' eyes. Less than three thousand infantry, with six hundred cavalry, they stood in the way of an army estimated at seven thousand foot and a thousand horse. It was no wonder that Tyrrell and Donal cast anxious eyes towards the south for a sign of Desmond's approach. They saw that the river, except where the long double bend reached up to their own flank, gave the battlefield a wide berth, so it would be easy for the Earl to cross it well to the east and then fall upon the enemy's left. They accordingly despatched messengers to him suggesting such a line of advance.

Scarcely had they done so when they received word that English advanced patrols had been sighted, and ten minutes later a regiment came into view, deployed on each side of the road, and in well ordered lines came up the slope against the centre of the ridge.

"The unfortunate fools!" muttered the Irish troops, as they awaited, with finger on trigger, the order to fire. It was evident that Essex, misled by those perfunctory scouts of his, had despatched this small body to clear the

way for him, with no idea that he was faced by a small army. On came the devoted regiment to within eighty yards of their crouching foes. Then with frightful suddenness came a burst of musketry. The English line was literally shot to pieces. Half the men were down, most of the rest turned to run, a few tried to stand and fire a return volley. In another minute these too were slain or routed, and the first attack was over.

And now Essex must have realised what was before him, for half an hour after this repulse a number of field pieces were brought into position, and a fierce bombardment of the Irish entrenchments began. For forty minutes the Irish troops endured the fiery ordeal without flinching. Their losses were not heavy, but it was a test of their morale to which the Munster levies would surely have succumbed but for the discipline to which they had been subjected by Tyrrell.

At length the bombardment ceased, and two bodies of infantry debouched from the trees that shrouded the English position. They came on with a rush, one against each of the Irish flanks, and two hotly conducted engagements began. On the left the thin line of Irish skirmishers was quickly driven in from the outskirts of the wood, but they clung on desperately to the denser depths of it, and after hard fighting the English sullenly desisted from their attempts to penetrate further. On the right the struggle was even more violent. Two regiments in succession were hurled against the house and buildings held by the men of Carbery. The first was driven back, shattered and disorganised, but the second secured a foothold in a copse on the very river bank, and clung to it until a third came charging to their assistance. Together these pushed their advantage, and at length secured the farm-house itself. It looked for a moment as if the Irish right was turned, but suddenly the reserve cavalry burst upon the scene and swept the English down the slope again.

The position was but partially saved. A body of English still held the farm-house and two of the outbuildings, which were now assailed by the Irish. The outbuildings

were quickly captured, but the farm-house resisted manfully. Attack after attack was beaten off, till a mound of Irish corpses ringed it round. Then, aghast at his losses, Donal drew off his furious soldiers and contented himself with keeping the post under close observation.

Anxiously the two generals looked again to the south. The situation was indeed critical. On both flanks the enemy had gained some useful ground, and another attack on the sorely-pressed right could hardly fail at the odds. Essex, however, would not seem to have realised how near his last attempt had come to success; a heavy drizzle which had begun while the fighting was at its hottest may have masked it from his observation. Whatever the cause, he now changed his tactics and began again to hammer the centre with his artillery. Donal had weakened this part of his line to repair the gaps in his right, and all his reserves of infantry had already been absorbed in the fighting line, so now all he could do was to withdraw some of Cormac's cavalry from the left to face this new menace. The bombardment did not last for long, and as soon as it ceased a strong column of infantry aimed for the right centre of the Irish line, supported by a hot enfilading fire that burst from the farm-house.

The men of Carbery were now in sore plight. Under the galling fire of that advanced post, Donal was obliged to draw back a large section of his threatened flank at right angles with his main line. And scarce was the manœuvre completed when the English column, torn but not delayed by the fire of the Irish, struck fiercely into his centre. Tenaciously Dermot Moyle's men clung to the ridge, but they were being surely pushed back, and were at the end of their resistance, when a party of Tyrrell's men from the largely unused left came hurrying to their aid, with Dermot O'Connor charging furiously at their head. The fighting was of the most savage description at close quarters, and under a lashing downpour the melée swayed now this way and now that over the crest of the ridge. O'Connor fought like a war-god, inspiring his men to super-human exertions, but soon weight of numbers told. The Irish line bent and broke, and with loud cheers

the English came surging through. A hundred of the Desmond cavalry plunging into the gap held them up only for a moment. Broken and wounded men were already beginning to take flight, when suddenly out of the mist behind came a heartening roar.

"Shanid abu! Shanid abu!"

The Geraldines had at last come to the rescue. One of their regiments struck the triumphant but wearied English column full in front and drove it headlong down the slope. Another came swarming round the captured farm-house, beat in its windows and doors, and massacred its heroic garrison. In a few minutes the ridge was cleared, and the English were in full retreat for Cahir.

And now the word came to Cormac to sweep around to the left and take the enemy in rear. He set forward at once, skirting the wood, where still some desultory firing could be heard, and emerged at length in full view of the routed English infantry. The word to charge was already on his lips, when out of the mist to his own left loomed a huge body of enemy horse. He had barely time to form for their reception when they were upon him with crushing force. Cormac's men numbered but three hundred; the enemy were twice as many. In two minutes after the first shock half the Ulstermen were down and the remainder were in flight.

But abandoned by the rout the three young leaders boldly stood their ground, by sheer swordsmanship thrusting off the enemies that swarmed round them. It was strange to see how differently the comrades carried themselves, thus pressed to the uttermost. Cormac, one tense embodiment of fiery purpose, played on his foes with terrific sweeps of his mighty blade. Owen, gay and debonaire, fenced coolly with his point, and laughed in the joy of battle. As for Conn, he was like some cold unpassioned machine that with horrible precision slew and slew and slew.

For five minutes these held the foe at bay, but they must inevitably have been overwhelmed had not some of their men profited by the respite thus gained to rally and

make a counter-charge. At the same time a strong body of infantry emerged from the wood, and before these united forces the enemy fled.

It was a great victory, but it might have been much greater. Many bitter things did Donal and Tyrrell say against the Sugaun Earl, who, by shrinking from the bold plan suggested by them, and contenting himself, as we have seen, with coming up in rear of his colleagues' position, had allowed Essex to escape destruction. The beaten English retreated the way they had come, with the Geraldines close on their heels, while the men who had borne the brunt of the fight lay exhausted on the ground they had held so gallantly. Two days later they pushed on towards Cahir Castle, which made no better stand than it had already done against Essex. There the army halted to await the return of the Geraldines.

Within a week the Earl appeared. He had pursued the English all the way to Leix, and there left them to the mercy of Owny O'More, who made sad havoc of them before they reached Dublin.

"And now for Kilmallock," said Donal and Tyrrell.

The Sugaun Earl stammered shamefacedly that he had promised his followers three months' leave as soon as Essex should have been expelled from Munster. Some of them, he said, were already on the way home.

Tyrrell and Donal stood speechless with indignation for a moment, and then without a word turned and walked away. With their own slender and war-worn forces an attack on Kilmallock would be sheer madness, so there was nothing for it but to postpone the attempt. Bitter was their disappointment, but it was hard to be angry for long with the good simple Desmond. He came after his two colleagues, explaining apologetically that he could not find it in his heart to keep his men so long from their wives.

"For, in sooth, I would willingly see the face of my own again," he added wistfully.

His simplicity was unanswerable. Tyrrell and Donal had to put the best face they could on the matter, and next day led back their forces to Carrigrone.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH A FOOL'S BOLT IS SHOT.

It was one thing to nominate a MacCarthy Mór; it was another to make that nomination effective, as the Ulstermen were soon to discover. Their protegé, flushed with victory, a few days after the battle of Croom, rode off for Bantry with O'Neill's letter in his pocket and a look of truculent self-satisfaction on his countenance, to make renewed application for the White Rod to O'Sullivan Mór; but in a couple of days he was back again at Carrigrone, rueful and dejected, and, striding into the room where O'Cahan was writing letters, flung himself moodily into the nearest chair.

"Well?" said O'Cahan.

"O'Sullivan is still obstinate," said Donal.

"Did you show him O'Neill's letter?"

"I did, and it might as well have been a sheet of pothooks scrawled by a schoolboy for all the respect he accorded it. When I gave it him he took it without a word, and turned me his back to read it. Then says he: 'Sir, this election is not O'Neill's,' and called a servant to show me the door. 'Sblood! a beggar at his gate would have received more courtesy. I drew my sword and called on him to do the same, but the white-livered cur called his clansmen to his aid, and—and perforce I had to come away."

"Hm!" O'Cahan grunted. "I fear, my friend, that you must renounce this white rod."

"Renounce it!"

"I have said so."

"What! Will O'Neill abandon me? Is his will so powerless?"

"No, sir. O'Neill is strong enough to disregard white rods. By his will you are MacCarthy Mór, so let that content you."

"By your leave," said Donal, "it shall not content me. A sorry MacCarthy Mór should I be without a rood of land to my name; useless to myself, useless to O'Neill. I have seven hundred bonnachts here that have received no pay for a month, and pay them I cannot until I am established in my territories. Look you, sir. Give me a troop of your cavalry, and I warrant that if I but show the Red Hand to my vassals I'll have no need of a white rod." O'Cahan looked at him hard. Donal went on: "Ay. The gentry will fear that banner, and the people love it. Only do as I ask, and the whole rising-out of Clan Carthy shall follow me to the walls of Cork; aye, and to Dublin when Cork is taken."

O'Cahan did not much admire Donal, but he recognised the force of his words. The leaderless sept had hitherto taken little part in the war, and its aid was essential to a complete victory. Donal, for all his faults, was brave, capable and energetic, and therefore well suited to the task.

"I'll think upon it," said O'Cahan. "But now leave me, I pray, for I must finish these letters."

As soon as Donal was gone O'Cahan sought out Tyrrell and recounted the interview to him.

"A most excellent proposal," said that general, "and for two reasons. Donal is a good man; that's the first. But the second is more important. The army has drained this countryside by its exactions, and it will scarce feed us for another week. The MacCarthy territories are rich and still untouched by the war. Let us move thither in force, and so give Donal our support and provision ourselves at the same time."

"Worthy counsellor," laughed O'Cahan. "We'll take your rede."

So next day the Earl of Desmond, Tyrrell, Donal, and their whole hungry following went marching into Kerry.

It was a land of mighty mountains that they entered—mountains that are now rugged and bare, but were then clad thickly with woods. Their tops were veiled that day by heavy wintry mists. A rising wind soughed and sighed like the ocean among the trees and screamed like a choir of demons among the chasmed rocks. A light dull rain drove before it, cutting the hands and faces of the travellers, swelling the hurrying streams that channelled the mountain paths. Still on through wild stony passes and bleak naked forests—the scene of his twenty years of brigandage—Donal conducted his allies. Then down the farther side they came, and emerged in a land of mournful bog, crossed by sluggish, discoloured streams, where the mists hung low and strange weird cries sounded in the veiled distance. And so, on the second day of their journey, they came to the little village of Killarney, lying huddled by the shore of dark Lough Leane. There the main army halted, while Donal, with O'Cahan and a few horsemen, rode over to Ross Castle.

They found the gate closed and the drawbridge raised. Donal forthwith sounded upon his horn, making a thousand echoes among the rocky hills. A porter appeared at the gate window.

"Ho, fellow!" said Donal. "Down with your bridge and admit MacCarthy Mór."

"Anon, sir," said the porter, and disappeared. Presently another face looked out of the window.

"I am the Warden of Ross," it said. "Who are you?"

Donal repeated his title.

"There is no MacCarthy Mór," said the warden, "and I know you not."

Donal shook out his banner, and Cormac backed him up with the Red Hand.

"I am Donal, son of Donal, son of Donal an Druimin, by the voice of O'Neill MacCarthy Mór."

The warden shook his head.

"I know of no Donal that has any claim to be MacCarthy Mór," he said. "There is no MacCarthy Mór at

the present time, and when there is his name will be Florence."

Donal angrily pressed his claim, but the warden was adamant. He dare admit no man, he said, who was not properly elected to the chieftainship, and from that position he would not budge. In vain Donal tried cajollery, bribes, threats, and at last in despair turned to O'Cahan.

"Shall O'Neill be flouted?" he cried. "Come, let us take the place by force."

"No," said O'Cahan. "An English war is enough for us, without undertaking a civil war as well."

"I'll not be baulked of my rights," said Donal stubbornly.

"O, come!" said the Earl, laying a soothing hand on his shoulder. "There is more than one castle in Desmond. Let us try another."

Between O'Cahan's firmness and the Earl's gentle persuasiveness Donal's aggressiveness was overruled, and he suffered himself to be led away. On the opposite shore of Lough Leane stood the more important fortress of the Palice, whither they turned their steps at once. But here they fared no better, and it was with the greatest difficulty that O'Cahan dissuaded the furious Donal from making an immediate attack upon it. The latter was sullen and morose that night, the accustomed sequel to his explosions of wrath, and his fiery language melted down to something like a whine.

"A proper way I am treated," he grumbled to O'Cahan, who shared his tent. "I who have fought for the good cause these twenty weary years; who have risked everything, life and limb and my newly acquired property for faith and fatherland; who have chased Essex, broken and beaten, out of Munster." So he droned on in tune to the ceaseless drip-drip of the rain on the canvas. "I was the first man in Munster to declare for O'Neill, and now he deserts me in my extremity. I have helped him to dominion over Ireland, and he will not even help me to my patrimony." He became plaintive, almost snivelling. "Yes; he deserts me. Great men were aye the same. They use their friends while they have need of them, and

then cast them away. Is it fair? Is it just? Is it gratitude? O, why did I ever lift my hand for an ungrateful country?"

He paused for a moment as if expecting an answer from his companion, but O'Cahan had fallen asleep.

Next day the army marched still deeper into the country. Passing through the Gap of Dunloe and skirting the majestic mountain mass of MacGillycuddy's Reeks—where the rain-clouds still hung dark and heavy—they traversed Iveragh and came to the Castle of Bally-Carbery on the sea coast. This, the most powerful and perhaps the most important of the MacCarthy strongholds, showed itself as hostile to Donal as its sister fortresses, and this time the baffled chieftain's rage knew no bounds. He swore by his hilt that he would storm the place and hang the warden, and it was only by threatening the withdrawal of O'Neill's support that O'Cahan brought him to reason.

"Well," said Donal, "if I cannot have the castles, I can at least rule the open country." And at his request the army pitched its camp at a place called Drishane, in the richest plain of all those territories.

It was soon found that the common clansmen were willing enough to recognise the son of their late chief as their ruler, for all Munster was ringing with the fame of his encounters with Essex, and these simple folk were unable to understand the high motives of policy which prevented Florence from claiming the fealty they had been ready to give him. Many of the gentry, too, whose houses were not defensible, made a virtue of necessity and acknowledged his lordship. For a short time the aspect of affairs looked brighter, but then the intoxication of power proved too much for Donal, and he began to act like Pausanias at Byzantium.

It is to be remembered that an Irish chief claimed as his perquisite certain rights and dues over the persons and properties of his subjects instead of the rents which were charged in a feudal community. These rights and dues were somewhat insufficiently defined, and more than once in Irish history we hear of fierce disputes on the

subject between chief and clan. Donal, feeling somewhat insecure in his tenure for lack of the white rod, seems to have thought that a sweeping assertion of his rights and a rigorous exaction of his dues would do something to compensate for the unconstitutional procedure of his election. In pursuance of this theory he assumed an almost royal state, levied the most unheard of taxation on his miserable followers, and gave his seven hundred rapacious bonnachts free quarters among the gentry and freeholders of his domains. It was in vain for the Ulstermen or the Earl to protest. Donal was now far more powerful than they, and scoffed at their warnings. In a few weeks the whole country was groaning under his exactions, and O'Cahan was looking forward to the time when O'Neill, as Donal's patron, would be almost as bitterly hated in Desmond as Queen Elizabeth herself.

The main army meanwhile lay encamped at Drishane, and there, while Essex was making his aimless campaign against O'Neill, and O'Donnell was winning fresh glory among the hills of Connaught, it waited in inglorious idleness, watching Donal make chaos of the well-ordered lands of MacCarthy Mór. Thus some weeks went by and the time was approaching, all too slowly, when the Geraldine should summon his forces to the field again.

But before that date arrived there rode up to the camp one morning a small party of horsemen, whose leader asked to be brought to the Earl of Desmond. It was Florence MacCarthy.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH O'CAHAN MEETS HIS MATCH.

The announcement of the elusive chieftain's advent produced very different effects upon the five occupants of the generals' tent. The Earl was thrown at once into a flutter by the thought of what awkwardness might ensue; Donal's brow darkened, and he looked round him from face to face of his companions to discover what feelings they might betray; Tyrrell simply looked bored at the prospect of a lengthy confabulation; and O'Cahan's countenance gave no indication of the ideas and speculations chasing each other rapidly through his brain. The fifth person present was Doctor MacCraghe, the good Bishop of Cork, whose sole emotion was apparently a lively curiosity.

"Bring him here," said Tyrrell shortly, and the soldier who had brought the news retired.

A moment later Florence entered the tent. He was magnificently dressed. With his plumed hat, his gold-embroidered doublet, his snowy lace-edged collar, his hose of purple silk, and the glitter of his many jewels he was in brilliant contrast with his weather-beaten hosts. These rose to greet him, and he fell at once upon his knee before the bishop and kissed his ring.

"A blessing, I pray, your lordship," he humbly craved. "I have been long and weary months among heretics, and I feel as if my soul needed assoilment."

The ecclesiastic was as flattered as his kind ever are to see this brilliant worldling at his feet. Graciously bestowing the favour requested he said: "Rise, my son," and resumed his seat with an air of gratified importance.

Florence rose, distributing smiles all round, and, addressing the company in general, said:

"I see you are surprised at this visit, gentlemen. It is true I have but just returned from England, yet I could not resist the temptation to visit the men with whose renown all Ireland is ringing. Donal, you have earned such a reputation for valour and wisdom as will add new lustre to the name of MacCarthy. You, my Lord of Desmond, I must felicitate upon the acquisition of a wider rule than ever earl of your race aspired to before. You, sir, I make no doubt, are the famous General Tyrrell" (Tyrrell bowed coldly). "I am happy to have met so truly distinguished a soldier and so devoted a champion of our holy Mother the Church." (Here Tyrrell winced.) "May your sword ever prosper," went on Florence serenely. "And you, sir," turning to O'Cahan, "I do not believe I have the honour——

"O'Cahan is my name," said the Ulsterman.

Florence grasped him impulsively by the hand and shook it warmly.

"Ah!" he said, "we have already some indirect acquaintance, have we not? Believe me, my foolish froward wife was entirely responsible for the unworthy reception you had at my house; and for the cowardly attack made upon you at the inn I shall yet hold to stern account that scoundrel MacGrath. I can see you are none the worse for the encounter, for which from my soul I thank God."

So he rattled along in that ingratiating way of his. There was not a man present, as well he knew, who did not distrust him; there was one at least who hated him. Yet presently before his pleasant cheery smile the hostile attitude, if not the hostility, of four of them had begun to thaw. Donal alone was uninfluenced. It was not that Florence's words were remarkably subtle—words alone would never have had much weight with O'Cahan—but the artless, childlike confidence of his manner, plainly implying that he had not the slightest suspicion of their suspicions of him, inspired in each breast a quite involuntary liking for the man which was not in the least dimi-

nished by the old distrust lurking underneath. In five minutes the simple Earl was his whole-hearted admirer; the blunt Tyrrell was almost as completely captivated; the bishop had been won over at the start; even O'Cahan succumbed to the spell that had dominated Elizabeth and Cecyll; distrust was still there, but he would gladly have been rid of it, though he despised himself for the weakness. Donal alone remained obdurate.

"I marvel," said he rudely, "that you dare to stand there, like the treacherous, deceitful Englishman you are, and pretend to be our friend. And still more do I marvel that you, gentlemen, should be so fond as to trust him. Why, his very raiment declares where his false heart is given."

O'Cahan was about to say something tactful, when Florence answered in soothing tones:

"Donal, thou wert ever zealous, and I honour you for it. As to this garb of mine, I could wear no other in England, nor would I have let it offend your sight but for the haste with which I came to visit you."

"A fit time you chose," sneered Donal, "for your visit to England."

Florence smiled with invincible good humour and patience, and turned appealingly to the others.

"Gentlemen, and you, my lord bishop, I will ask you to judge whether my visit to England was not justifiable and productive of good results. When I departed thither there was no sign of a blow for freedom being struck in Munster, and had I not gone many fair tracts of Desmond and Carbery would have been seized upon by English undertakers."

"'Tis very true," said the bishop, sagely nodding his head.

"Yes, yes," said the earl. "You acted rightly, Florence.

"I thank you," said Florence. "Well, gentlemen, the Queen has graciously assigned those self-same lands to me—your pardon, Donal; allow me to finish—I know right well that she gave me what was not hers to give; that by our Irish laws all land belongs to the clan. There-

fore I will not touch it, nor will I even take the chieftainship of the clan unless chosen therefor by the voice of its gentlemen and freeholders as ever has been our custom."

"Nobly and modestly spoken, Florence," said the bishop. "You can say nothing against that, Donal. With the gentlemen of Desmond and Carbery let the choice rest and this unfortunate contest be ended."

As Donal stood speechless with indignation, O'Cahan interposed.

"That is not all that is needed," he said. "If the men of Desmond make choice of a man that is not devoted to the cause of Ireland, the Irish leader has a right to reject him."

"By God, he has," said Donal.

"Most heartily I agree," said Florence. "But the loyal gentlemen of Desmond will make no such mistake."

"Traitor! Villain!" shouted Donal. "Never will I yield you one foot of these territories."

Florence appealed again to the bishop.

"My lord," he said, "see how I am abused and misunderstood. No claim have I made to this lordship save to abide by the suffrage of its people. Yet Donal talks as if it were already his."

"It *is* mine," cried Donal. "By right of sword and by the voice of O'Neill it is mine. Where were you, Florence, when I was winning back the Castles of Desmond from the stranger? Where were you when I was chasing Essex out of Munster? Simpering at the feet of the painted hag that robs our land and crushes our religion."

"Donal! Donal!" admonished the bishop gently. "Such language is unfitting before one holding my office. I cannot allow it."

"Then devil take you all!" cried Donal furiously, and rushed from the tent.

"He'll be off to Cork in that mood," said O'Cahan in consternation, and went out after him.

"Truly I am sorry to have offended him," said Florence. "In the quarrel that lies before us all Irishmen should be at peace, for if we fight not as one man we are lost."

Tyrrell wrung his hand, saying:

"You speak well, sir. I am sick of these Munster wrangles. They will be the ruin of us yet."

"Not if I can prevent it," said Florence. "But there is one other thing that may ruin us, for which you yourselves are in part to blame. You have been quartered on this country now for many weeks, and wherever I go I hear complaints of Donal's extortion."

"'Tis true," said Tyrrell. "He is over anxious to exert the powers of his chieftaincy, and has indeed made many heavy exactions upon the people."

"'Tis a pity," said Florence, "for this country is the back and strength of all Munster, and if it be exhausted now there will be nothing to fall back upon afterwards."

"Yet if we leave it," said the earl, "we shall incense Donal still further."

"Not if you will be advised by me," said Florence. "Twenty miles from here lies the territory of Ibane, which is the property of my Lord Barry, a Queen's man, and an old-time enemy of Donal's that used to harry him mightily in his loose days. If you quarter yourselves there you shall achieve three purposes: the gratification of Donal, the injury of the Queen, and the sparing of our own territories."

"I wonder we did not think of that before," said Tyrrell.

Meanwhile O'Cahan had overtaken Donal, and with difficulty induced him to listen to reason.

"Can you not have patience?" he said. "You have O'Neill's voice to the succession, which you will find counts heavily for you. More he cannot give, and it is for you to prove yourself worthy to the gentlemen of the clan."

Donal maintained a sulky silence.

"You can do that, Donal," resumed O'Cahan. "Already your victories have put your name in every man's mouth. The conqueror of Croom, I warrant, will stand high for the chieftaincy of a war-loving people."

Donal could not help a smile of self-satisfaction.

"We cannot win this war without you," said O'Cahan.

"But neither can we win it without Florence. You must therefore be friends with him. For if we lose the war what benefit will the lands and title be to you? Unless you have a liking to rule over ashes and corpses."

The sound commonsense of this was obvious to Donal, and the subtle flattery of it pleased him. Whatever intuition of desertion he may have entertained he now renounced. O'Cahan left him and returned to the tent.

There he was amazed to see what inroads Florence had made upon the affections of his friends, and somewhat taken aback to learn of the arrangement just concluded. But while he could not help having misgivings at the thought of leaving the "back and strength of all Munster" in control of one whose fidelity was so questionable, he felt at the same time that those territories were rather worse than useless to the cause in their present chaos. So he resigned himself to the inevitable and agreed to the evacuation, while inly he was wondering whether the skilful Florence had not staged Donal's exit for the deliberate purpose of getting rid of himself and driving the bargain in his absence.

That night Florence shared the Earl's tent, and rode away next morning in high good humour. But Donal's fury was rekindled hotter than ever by the decision to abandon what he still insisted on calling his territory. When the others marched away he lingered behind, hoping that this might induce them to change their minds. It produced no such effect; so a few days later, fearful of being defrauded of his share of the spoils of Ibane, he came hot on their heels.

They noticed that his following was somewhat diminished and his manner more indicative of mortification than of anger when he joined them.

"Fools!" he cried, as he burst into the generals' tent. "You are cheated, blinded and deluded. The Queen's minion has been simply playing upon you. What do you think he did as soon as you were gone?"

"What, in God's name?" asked Tyrrell.

"He occupied every pass in Desmond and Carbery with his clansmen, who came treading on our heels as we

marched away. All the castles are in his hands and he is filling the land with bonnachts. He pays them well, too, the crafty devil, so that a hundred of my villains were enticed to join him. Will you now believe that the man is a traitor?"

It was a curious fact that Florence's spell departed with his presence. Tyrrell and the Earl, no longer influenced by it, now turned in dismay to O'Cahan. But the man who had felt least of the charm of Florence present was now least alarmed by Florence absent.

"What less could a prudent man do?" he asked. "Would you have entrusted the back and strength of all Munster to a man who would leave the passes open? I knew he would do this, or I would never have agreed to let him stay there."

"Bah!" said Donal. "You are still bewitched. 'Tis not for O'Neill that Florence is holding the country."

"Well we shall test him," said O'Cahan. "My Lord of Desmond, your men should soon be in the field again. If Florence is truly on our side he will hardly refuse to join us in an attack on Cork. If he does we shall be well able to take it without him, and then we shall know how to treat him."

"He'll 'scape the dilemma somehow," predicted Donal gloomily, as O'Cahan sat down to write his message.

But the letter was never delivered. That very night word was brought to Tyrrell that O'Neill had concluded an armistice for an indefinite period with Essex, so Florence remained untested.

"The man has the devil's own luck," grumbled Donal.

Idle week after idle week went by. Florence still remained inscrutable; the territories of MacCarthy Mór still remained closed to both friend and foe; the English army still cowered in Cork; and the Irish still feasted fat on the land of Ibane. Such was the atmosphere that at length was quickened by the news that O'Neill himself was on his way to Munster.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH LEATH-CUINN JOINS HANDS WITH LEATH-MOGHA.

On a bright mild winter's day Cormac rode into Inniscarra on the Lee to make preparation for his prince's reception. The sleepy little town presented an unusually animated appearance. It had decked itself gaily with flags and streamers to welcome the great deliverer. Every roof and window showed the banner of MacCarthy, the Red Hand of Ulster, or the national sunburst, gold on its azure field. Coloured festoons hung in bright profusion across the streets, and at the entrance to the market square stood a gaudy triumphal arch.

There was merry chatter everywhere and a pleasant discord of musical sounds. The whole neighbourhood in its best attire had come into town for the great event, and a swarm of wandering minstrels had gathered for their entertainment. Here a harper pulled his plaintive strings, there a piper droned and screamed, and everywhere the merry timpan tinkled amid the clatter of happy dancers. Above all could be heard the voices of some enterprising old women who had set up booths in the market square and cried their wares to all and sundry with a " Four fine apples or three buns a penny."

All day long the great Munster lords, with their brilliant cavalcades of retainers, had been riding through and around the town, some putting up at either of its two little inns, but most of them setting up their own richly appointed tents in the neighbouring fields. The previous day the army had moved up from Ibane and was now encamped a mile to the east of the town guarding the road from Cork.

Cormac's business was to secure the principal inn as headquarters for O'Neill and a suitable ground for his men. That done, he had leisure for a yet more absorbing

task—to wit, the courting of a pretty Inniscarra maid who had caught his eye from an upper window as he rode into the town.

He found her stroking the nose of his horse at the gate of the field where he had left it while surveying the site for the camp with its owner.

"Well, my pretty bird," he said. "So you've stolen from your nest, have you? What will father and mother say?"

She laughed at him boldly. She was but sixteen years of age, and her eyes were blue and her hair golden.

"I have none," said she. "They were killed in the war ever so long ago." She said it quite carelessly as if such a story were the most everyday thing in the world—as indeed it was with her, for most of her playmates could say the same.

"I live with a grumpy old aunt," she went on, "who told me not to come out to-day for fear the Ulstermen might eat me."

"She was wise," said Cormac, "for, by my soul, you're a dainty morsel."

The girl laughed again.

"Tell me what all the pother is about," said she. "What are the Ulstermen coming here for? And who is this Hugh O'Neill whose name is on every lip?"

"Bless my soul, girl!" cried Cormac in astonishment. "This aunt of thine must have kept thee very straitly confined. What! Not know who O'Neill is? Why thou makest me stagger!"

"Who is he, then?" persisted the girl.

Cormac had to try and explain.

"And what comes he here for?" was the maiden's next query.

"Why, to urge the men of this part to take arms for their faith and fatherland."

The girl laughed more merrily than ever.

"He'll be hard put to it," said she. "The men here will not give over swearing and drinking for their faith, so I think they'll scarce fight for it. But tell me, fair soldier, what is fatherland?"

"Hm!" ejaculated Cormac. "'Tis evidently a word little mentioned in Munster. But what are we talking politics for when there's other matter more attractive? What is thy name, maiden?"

"Rosaleen. And thine?"

"Cormac. Rosaleen is a sweet name."

"To how many hast thou said the like before?"

"To none, on my soul. For (he added to his conscience) I never wooed a Rosaleen yet." Then aloud: "Wilt thou kiss me, Rosaleen?"

The distant roll of drums, the faint skirl of pipes, the sound of horses' hoofs and the feet of marching men. Cormac was alert in a minute.

"My countrymen!" he said to the girl. "Listen."

There was no doubt of it. The army was at hand.

"Here, Rosaleen. Up on this stone, girl, and you shall view the finest soldiers in the world. See, here they come."

The girl stood tiptoe in excitement on top of a milestone, supported by Cormac's arm round her waist. From all directions the townspeople came running to the music, and the road was soon thickly lined with them. Presently the head of the Ulster army came into sight.

"See, O'Neill's own cavalry," said Cormac.

Down the road they came, splendid men splendidly mounted, a huge sabre in every hand, a great battle-axe clanking at every saddle. They went by with a great jingling, and then there was a short gap.

"Here comes our banner," said Cormac. Then, as the breeze blew out its folds, "Lámh Dearg Abu," he vociferated, to the great enjoyment of the crowd.

The snowy flag with its terrible emblem came on. With it were the pipers and drummers playing a rousing tune. It has been rediscovered in degenerate later days by a drawing-room poet and set to some simpering words about a Young May Moon; but it held sterner suggestions than of lovers' trysts as now vented by the sturdy lungs of the pipers of the Kinel-Owen.

Then came the infantry, a thousand veteran warriors from all the clans under the sway of O'Neill.

"See that first troop of Galloglasses," said Cormac to

his fair companion, "the men with the coats of mail and the long battle-axes. Those are of the Clan Cahan from Arachty and the banks of the Bann. The kern that follow are O'Hagan's men from Tulloghoge, the guardians of the stone chair of the O'Neills. Ah! and here are O'Neill's own musketeers from the country round Dungannon."

"And who are these that follow?" asked the girl.

"These? Oh, these are but bonnachts hired out of the wild parts of Connacht. Their swords are for any man's hire. Look now."

The mercenary troops, two thousand in number, went by, and a little group of mounted men came into sight.

"These are the chiefs," said Cormac. "See, that man in front on the sorrel horse is my uncle, Cormac MacBaron O'Neill. Behind him come MacGuire of Fermanagh and Ever MacMahon of Oriel, and between them on the big black horse is Hugh O'Neill."

A cheer rose from the crowd as the great prince went by, and O'Neill responded with bows and smiles. A proud man was Hugh that day. Two years ago he had been but a provincial chief struggling desperately against aggression. Now he was the acknowledged leader of a nation; victor in many a hard-fought field over one of the greatest of the world's sovereigns; the ally of the King of Spain, and the beloved son of the Pope, who had sent him a crown of phœnix plumes in token of his estimation. And surely monarch never received such loyal welcome as that which now came bursting from the throats of the people of Munster. For, however their lords might dally and temporise, the hearts of the common folk were true, and they rent the very heaven in the frenzied joy of their liberation.

The letters which O'Neill had sent before him carried in their laconic terseness a very definite meaning to the time-serving gentlemen of Munster. He would come, said these missives, to learn their intentions in regard to the great question of the nation's liberty and religion. And there was a significant addition to the effect that any who were backward in the cause would be treated as enemies.

Finally, the day and the hour were appointed on which he would meet his friends.

On the morning after his arrival he held audience at the inn, and thither they all flocked.

The Earl of Desmond came with his brother, the White Knight, and the other Geraldines in his train. The MacCarthies of Muskerry followed, and then came O'Sullivan Beare, O'Driscoll, O'Connor Kerry, O'Donovan, and a score of lesser chieftains. The earliest of all had been Donal MacCarthy, who arrived with a face full of eager expectancy while O'Neill was still at breakfast. He evidently had boons to ask and plans to propose, but he was dismissed after a short and formal interview to make room for the Sugaun Earl. Thereafter he paced the street outside in deep anxiety, with a wary look always for the arrival of Florence.

But was Florence coming? That question was in more minds than Donal's. The Lord of Muskerry, who also had a good claim to be MacCarthy Mór, was asking it with as much anxiety as the bastard. Soon it was on every lip in Inniscarra. It was asked among the townsfolk gathered round the inn where O'Neill was holding audience. It was asked among the soldiers on guard in the hall. It was asked by every chieftain making his way to or from the audience chamber. It plainly worried O'Neill himself, making him anxious and irritable and very short in his conversations.

"Note it down, Philip," said Cormac to the historian as they strolled along the beribboned main street. "All Munster breathlessly awaits the advent of Florence MacCarthy. You'll catch the atmosphere of suspense better now than later, when doubt will have been set at rest."

"Bah!" said Philip. "I'm off work to-day."

"Your history will be the drier for it," said Cormac.

"'Tis two o'clock," said Philip. "Our ladies stay upon us."

And off they went to picnic in the fields with Rosaleen and another damsel who had caught Philip with her charms.

The afternoon wore on, and still Florence did not appear; neither did O'Sullivan Mór. All the audiences were over; the Munster lords had retired to the pavilions set up for them outside the town, and O'Neill was in his private room in earnest colloquy with Tyrrell and O'Cahan, when a cheer was heard at the southern entry to the town. From its length and volume there could be no doubt of its cause: it was exactly like Florence to stage his arrival in such a manner. A few minutes later he rode up to the inn, smiling and debonnair as usual, with O'Sullivan Mór at his side. Both were in Irish costume and rode without stirrups.

O'Neill immediately dismissed Tyrrell and O'Cahan, and the two great lords were closeted together for over an hour. At the end of that time O'Neill appeared at the door and desired O'Cahan to send for Donal. The latter was easily found, for ever since he had heard of Florence's arrival he had been prowling tormentedly in the vicinity of the inn.

"What does he want me for? Has Florence found favour with him? Am I still to be MacCarthy Mór?" These and a dozen similar questions he anxiously put to O'Cahan as the latter piloted him to the audience-chamber.

"You shall be answered in full by himself," said O'Cahan at last, and ushered him inside.

What occurred in that room nobody knows. Perhaps Florence's all-conquering charm stood to him once again. Perhaps O'Neill gambled the certainty of seven hundred bonnachts against the chance of half Munster. Perhaps his cold grey eye pierced to the hearts and inner motives of both these men, and in that moment saw the shattering of his own mighty purpose, whereat he flung the election contemptuously to the giver of the rod. All that can be recorded for certain is that in twenty minutes Donal emerged, with bitterness and humiliation graven deep in his countenance, and rode instantly away to the encampment of his bonnachts; and that evening town and countryside buzzed with the news that Florence was to be installed at once as MacCarthy Mór.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE FOX DISSUADES THE LION FROM MAKING A SPRING.

The weather still continues mild and sunny, which is fortunate for the great crowds assembling to see the grand spectacle. For the present all that is vouchsafed to them (as they stand patiently for an hour and more waiting for the ceremony to begin) is the view, over the heads and between the pikes of the soldiery, of a large gaunt platform with a semicircle of seats on it, three chairs and a rather handsome lectern. O'Neill, they learn, is giving a banquet to his allies in the great tent over yonder, and they must wait on his pleasure, which they do, after their manner.

Suddenly there is a hum of excitement from those in a position to see.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

The great ones have finished their meal and are moving in procession towards the platform, which they reach by a broad flight of draped steps.

"Which is O'Neill?" is asked everywhere, and the knowing ones point him out to the others. He is the last to mount the platform, and it is noticed that he is by no means the tallest man in the company (which is a grave disappointment to some). The remainder are less unfamiliar. Every one of those chiefs who takes a seat in the semicircle has friends or clansmen in the crowd; the venerable man on O'Neill's right can only be the good Bishop MacCraghe, whilst the richly-robed personage on his left must be the Earl of Desmond. As to the chieftain on the Bishop's right, bearing the long white wand, not a

man in all Munster but knows him for O'Sullivan Mór.

This brilliant assemblage was hardly in position when, amid enthusiastic cheering, a small group of horsemen cantered up from the town; it was Florence MacCarthy and his kinsmen and vassals. They rode up to the platform and dismounted. Then Florence, his brother, and O'Sullivan Beare leading, they ascended the steps and bowed to O'Neill and the Bishop.

All present rose to their feet. A Bible was produced and placed on the lectern, and Florence, with his hand upon it, pronounced in clear tones that could be heard by every ear in that huge assembly a solemn oath that he would be true to the cause for which the nation was in arms, and to the leader of the nation, Hugh O'Neill. Then O'Sullivan Beare came forward and presented him with wheat and salt in prediction of future peace and prosperity, and, amid further deafening cheers and a burst of music from O'Neill's pipers, O'Sullivan Mór handed him the White Rod.

A loud triumphant shout burst from the multitude. Then the Bishop arose and bestowed a solemn blessing upon the newly-elected chief and upon his whole people; and after that the minor lords and gentlemen of the clan came up one by one to offer homage. When this ceremony was concluded O'Neill stood up and advanced to the edge of the platform. There was another salvo of cheers, and then an expectant silence. The Prince spoke.

"My lords and gentlemen and people of Munster," he said, "this day marks not the end of a war, but the beginning of one; for our pact with Essex is expired, and we will have no more truces. We drew the sword first for the righting of wrongs, but wrongs that are righted by the sword may be repeated when the sword is sheathed, and for my part, were there no better purpose for the drawing than this, I would that my sword had never left my hip. A tame soul may strive for the alleviation of wrongs, but a proud one thirsts for the enjoyment of right. To demand freedom of worship and security from plantations, that is the prayer of slaves. To fight for them, that is but the uniting of slaves. But to fight for free-

dom, for the ending of the rule of foreigners, that is the part of men; that is the part of the sons of a great nation; that is the only part befitting the blood of Miledh."

O'Neill paused a moment as if to study the effect of his words.

"Too lofty," whispered O'Cahan to Cormac. "See, the populace is only puzzled. Why will he not speak such words as he spoke to the soldiers on the morning of Drumfluich?"

"And see if some of the Geraldines are not dismayed," said Cormac. "The White Knight blanches to the tips of his rattish whiskers. This fight to the utterance tempts not his stomach, I'm thinking."

"Why," resumed O'Neill, "should a foreign Queen lord it over us any longer? Why should not this land of ours be great and have a destiny of her own? Surely God meant her for more than an appendage or dependency to England? O! 'tis wormwood to my soul to think upon the race of Nial bowing to the base breed of Plantagenet and Tudor. I will have no more of it. Better die sword in hand than suffocate in servility. And you, men of Munster, are you tame? or have you worn the chain so long that it has ceased to gall? Are you content to lie under the heel of Saxon churls, happy if they will but let you live? Or will you hold now to the good sword whose strength you have felt, and raise your land to the greatness and dignity of France or England or even Spain itself? Aye, she shall be the equal of any if she will but grasp at her freedom; and freedom shall be hers if her faith prove as firm as her valour."

"The White Knight mislikes that word 'faith,'" whispered O'Cahan to Cormac. "And the more I look at him the more I mislike the White Knight."

O'Neill continued:

"Do not think that this freedom of which I speak is a luxury for our ambition; 'tis rather a necessity for our existence. If we be content with anything less, then not only shall Ireland be deprived of the glories of which I have spoken, but she shall fall lower than ever she fell before—lower than when Cairbre Kinncat held usurper's

sway in Tara; lower than when Turgesius planted his blood-spattered throne in Clonmacnoise—for she shall cease to be Ireland.

"For these English are not content with suzerainty. So long as they have one tittle of power over us our laws and customs are ever in jeopardy, as who knows better than you men of Munster? For before you took arms in this blessed cause the best of your land was held by strangers, and heretics worshipped in your churches. Already in vast territories the sound of the harp was silent, and the bard and the traveller and the poor man were turned from the surly house of the bodach. Already the Saxon jargon frightened the birds in the woods of Desmond, making their singing tuneless. Already English law ruled in the land, and the law of the Brehon was forgotten. Ancient territories were being cut up into English-made shires, and their names lost to the memory of man. Free clansmen were paying rent to Saxon churls or purchased chiefs; great chiefs were exchanging their honourable titles for paltry earldoms. And as once the English who came amongst us lost their savageness and became Irish as we, so now were you surely becoming English.

"Is this to be? Is not your land dear to you? Do you not love its wooded hills and pleasant valleys? Are not our ways kindlier than foreign ways? Is not Irish speech softer to our ears, readier to our tongues, and better fitted to express what is in our minds than English? Is not our attire handsomer than English breeches? Shall we cripple our horsemanship with stirrups? Is not Tanistry a kinder usage and a manlier than feudal tenure? Are we not happier for fosterage and gossipred? Shall we desert our ancient faith for a prayer book made in London? No, by my soul."

"This tune goes better," whispered Cormac to O'Cahan, as a low murmur of approval began to rise from the crowd.

"Men of Munster," said O'Neill, "does not the name of O'Sullivan, of O'Driscoll, of MacCarthy Mór sound more honourable in your ears than any English earldom?

And you, my lords "—turning to the semicircle of notabilities behind him—" would you not rather march at the head of free and loyal clansmen than be carried on the necks of cringing tenants?"

A shout of assent came from people and lords alike.

" Your voices speak your spirit," said O'Neill. " From to-day Ireland fights as Ireland; all the four provinces are armed against the invader. No longer shall one clan or one province go forth to battle alone; no longer shall one chief call the Palesmen to help him against another; no longer shall any chief levy Black Rent upon the Pale. But all Ireland shall contend with England, and the Pale shall be brought within the domain of Ireland. The battle is only begun; but if we stand united in faith, by our valour we shall win it. England still has her grip on the soil of Ireland. The Pale is hers, part of Leinster is hers, three towns in Munster are hers, and Thomond is held for her by the false breed of the noble Brian. These lands we must gain ere we can boast ourselves free. By our own valour we can win them, and on our own valour we must rely; but over and above that we shall have help. For this day I have received a letter promising immediate supplies of men, arms and money from his Most Catholic Majesty the King of Spain."

Amid wilder cheering than ever O'Neill sat down.

" See the White Knight now," said O'Cahan to Cormac. " This news out of Spain puts him in a pretty quandary. He's frightened of both sides in the struggle and knows not which to back. If I were O'Neill I'd hang the fellow."

" Tush!" said Cormac. " One does not waste good rope on rats."

The next day dawned cold and grey, with a tendency to drizzle. Midday saw O'Neill and MacCarthy off for a reconnaissance towards Kinsale, escorted by a detachment of the cavalry of each. The two chiefs rode in front; then came Cormac's regiment of Ulstermen, shabby, war-stained, and sadly reduced in numbers (only

forty-two left out of one hundred and thirty); behind them rode fifty of the finest horsemen of Carbery, spick and span and with perfectly polished accoutrements, looking, as Conn MacSweeney remarked, like men who had borne the brunt of two years' neutrality.

Cormac and his two lieutenants rode in front of their regiment, and as close on the heels of O'Neill and MacCarthy as they dared, for the young man's mistrust of Florence was not in the least mitigated by the favour shown to him by his father, and he was anxious to hear what the elusive one might have to say. He soon found, however, that that was impossible, and contented himself with the conversation of his companions. Conn was talkative enough, but he found Owen abstracted and inclined to be vague in his answers. A rather inane smile, he noticed, kept hovering about his lips, sometimes, as it were, breaking loose and running all round his face.

"It doesn't do to sleep in the open these moonlit nights," remarked Cormac to Conn when this phenomenon had been repeated half a dozen times. "Diana has kissed our poor friend and carried off his wits."

"See, he smiles at the memory of it," said Conn.

"Thou art a fool, Conn," said Owen, waking up at last. "And you too, Cormac. Tell me, you who are so observant, have you heard the latest news from Cork?"

"Now Owen," said Cormac, "don't tell us that the arrival of a new Lord President is the source of these happy smiles."

"I tell you it is," said Owen. "For the Lord President has a secretary, and the secretary has a niece, who is also his ward; and though Sir George Carewe—Conn, that wink of thine is a very vile wink, and thy face in making it becomes marvellous ill-favoured—though, as I say, Sir George Carewe is a scoundrel and Master Stafford a scoundrel's jackal, yet is Mistress Marjorie Stafford"—he blushed slightly on pronouncing the name "a very sweet lady, and, with your help, shall soon be my wife."

"Marjorie Stafford!" said Conn. "Why, Cormac, 'tis the very same wench that he used to rave about years ago

when he first came from England. Most constant lover, dost thou love her still?"

"Ay, by my faith," said Owen, bashful but sturdy.

"And she an Englishwoman!" said Cormac reproachfully.

"Only in blood," said Owen, "but not in manners. She hates her nation's injustice to ours, and when we are married she will be a true Irishwoman. I taught her to speak some Irish when we were together."

"I would like to see this paragon," said Cormac.

"So you shall. I have said that with your help I will marry her."

"With our help?"

"Yes. She is coming to Cork with her guardian, and has sent me letters begging me to carry her away."

"Out of the enemy's camp?" said Cormac. "I'm with you, Owen."

"And I," said Conn. "When shall it be?"

"Nay, that I cannot tell you yet. But see, is not this Kinsale?"

The road had been mounting a hill during their conversation, and now they had reached the top. O'Neill and MacCarthy had already halted, and Cormac ordered his men to do the same. More than a mile away could be seen the battlements and turrets of a fair-sized town, with the sea beyond it, and a couple of warships lying near by. The two chieftains sat their horses contemplating the view in silence, while Cormac, still keeping a respectful distance, shifted his ground to leeward, and so caught most of the subsequent conversation.

"And yet it seems reasonably weak," said O'Neill.

"Seems, but is not," said Florence. "The walls, though not very thick, are in excellent condition, and are well manned with guns. I could never attempt the place without heavy artillery, for the ground before the walls is flat, and infantry in their asasult would suffer most terribly."

"Yet I have a mind to attempt it," said O'Neill, "for your people will surely be disheartened if we return to Ulster without some worthy deed."

"Say rather that they will be disheartened if you meet with disaster in their midst, as you surely will if you attack any of these towns. Let us be content to leave them for the present. We are strong enough now to hold our own in the open country until the cannons come from Spain. Then I will be the first to urge an assault; but to hurl our men unsupported against stone walls were but to waste our strength and hazard all we have."

"Well, keep good watch here when I am gone," said O'Neill, and gave the signal for the return march. It was Cormac's turn to be silent now. The conversation he had heard filled him with vague alarms and suspicions. He could not but admit, as his father had done, that Florence's arguments were excellent; but neither could he help feeling that they did not speak that chieftain's own mind. . . . And how he would have loved a fierce attack on that defiant stronghold under O'Neill's own leadership!

It was almost dark when they approached Inniscarra, but it was possible to see dimly another small party of horsemen verging towards them along the road from Cork. As the heads of both bodies reached the junction of their routes together Cormac heard his father call out: "What! Is that MacGuire?"

"What's left of him," answered a voice, which, though faint and unsteady, was recognisably that of the Chief of Fermanagh.

"What?" cried O'Neill, reining in his horse. "Art thou hurt?"

"You may call it hurt," said the other grimly, and evidently with lips compressed. "But I've sent for a priest, not a doctor."

"In heaven's name, what has happened?" asked O'Neill, coming closer in the darkness, while one of MacGuire's followers put a hand to his chief's shoulder as if to support him in the saddle.

MacGuire spat out a mouthful of blood that made a darker stain on the dark muddy road. And on the moment the wind tore a cloud from the face of the moon, so that a ray lit up for an instant the figure of the stricken chief.

He was ghastly pale, with streaks of crimson at the corners of his mouth, and the right breast of his tunic was soaked with blood.

"'Twas a bickering we had with a pack of English near Cork," he said. "We came on them unawares, so that their leader and I, both somewhat ahead of our men, had barely sighted each other when his bullet was in my breast and my spear in his neck. I hope his hurt is as mortal as mine."

"Pray heaven your own is curable," said O'Neill.

"Nay," said MacGuire, again spitting blood. "I've had too many wounds in my time to mistake one for death. But see, here comes my funeral."

Lights appeared round the bend of the road, and a horseman came dashing up to MacGuire saying: "My lord, all's well. I've brought a priest."

"Help me from the saddle, I beseech you," said MacGuire. "I can scarce do it alone."

Willing hands assisted the wounded man to the ground, where he collapsed with a groan of pain. O'Neill, MacCarthy, Cormac and the rest were all on their feet by this time, and the troopers were halted some distance away. MacGuire was laid on a heap of mantles on a bank by the roadside, and O'Neill himself put a flask to his lips. Just as he regained consciousness the men with the torches appeared on the scene, the Bishop MacCraghe, very anxious and fussy, in their midst.

"My lord! my lord! Are you hurt?" he said inanely.

"I am spent, my lord," said MacGuire. "And if you don't haste and shrive me the devil will have me first."

It was a strange scene that was now enacted in the flaring light of the six torches. The dying chief, on the verge of exhaustion, had summoned his last reserves of strength to raise himself on his elbow and in feverish haste unburden his soul of its sins. The white-haired bishop knelt in the mud at his side, his ear inclined to catch the laboured whisper of the penitent. O'Neill and the rest, with heads bowed, stood respectfully aloof. The moon shone out at infrequent intervals, and a rising wind made the torches roar. Down the road could be heard

the stamp and jingle of impatient horses, and away across the fields sounded the various noises of the camp. Two men half a mile off laughed heartily over a joke.

"Ego te absolvo," said the bishop, making the sign of the cross.

"O'Neill," said MacGuire, and the prince strode to his side.

"There'll be trouble in Fermanagh," said MacGuire. "Tell them . . . tell them . . ." He strove vainly to continue. Blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell back dead.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH CORMAC KEEPS HIS SWORD IN THE SCABBARD.

The storm-clouds came up out of the east, marshalled by a roaring wind, and burst into torrents of rain against the hills of Munster. Then the blasts, having done their work, tore themselves away, leaving the deluge behind them. For two days the downpour continued with steady persistent monotony, turning the fields into quagmires and the roads into rivulets, and drenching the troops in their meagre tents. On the third it ceased, but the clouds still hung heavy and black overhead as if threatening worse to come.

On that morning Dermot O'Connor, with Cormac, Owen and Conn, rode over from the camp to Inniscarra. The little town had a huddled, bedraggled look. Its flags and streamers hung dank and dreary; its triumphal arch was sodden and disreputable; the encampments of the great lords had nearly all disappeared. The young men dismounted at the inn, and in a few moments were in the presence of O'Neill.

The great chief looked weary and troubled. The death of MacGuire—his personal friend and one of his most accomplished officers—had been a heavy blow to him. There were dissensions in Fermanagh which would require his immediate presence, though his work in Munster was still unfinished; and a new and vigorous Lord Deputy was already in the field, menacing the borders of Ulster. England was putting forth her full strength for the contest, and Ireland, he bitterly realised, still held to her old ways with the fatuity of a nation that the gods have made mad.

When the young men entered he looked up from the writing on which he was engaged, and after a brief greeting announced that he intended to march north next day. He would take with him all the Ulster troops, including those of Tyrrell's detachment and Cormac's horsemen, but he would leave fourteen hundred bonnachts under Dermot, with the other three as his lieutenants, to stiffen the Munster forces. They would be directly under the Earl of Desmond, and would owe obedience to no other Munster lord.

O'Connor's face lit up with gratified ambition, and all four murmured some words of thanks for the honour done them, but O'Neill went on unheeding.

"You must know," he said, "that Florence MacCarthy has returned to Carbery, promising to deliver me his eldest son as a pledge of his fidelity. You, Cormac, will go to-morrow to Innishannon with a troop of Dermot's horse to receive the boy; and you will keep him for me, Dermot, under restraint, but with all honour, at Castle Lishin in Desmond, which the Earl has assigned for your headquarters. That is all, gentlemen. Cormac, my lad, will you sup with me to-night by way of farewell?"

Cormac accepted the invitation, and the four took their departure. That night at supper, which father and son took alone together, O'Neill was silent, almost morose.

"The Munster air makes you sad, father," said Cormac at length.

"What?" said O'Neill, arising hastily out of his abstraction. "No; 'tis not the Munster air, but the Munster men. Their quarrels and cross-purposes bid fair to drive me mad. I have just now wasted three good hours judging the claims of two foolish lords to a ten-acre field. In the end, when my head was near splitting and the argument still unfinished, I divided it equally between them and sent both away dissatisfied. O! the blindness, folly and cupidity of these petty chiefs! Not one can see over his own hedge; not one fears any greater danger than that his neighbour may win some advantage over him; not one but thinks I am come here for no other purpose than to fix his boundaries for him. The lords of

Muskerry will furnish no man to the national army until I settle their succession, and when I have done that the defeated one will go over to the English. The White Knight has such a hatred of the Earl of Desmond that he wants to be exempted from obedience to him. I am wearied of them all, and could almost wish them back in their bondage."

"You say nothing of Florence MacCarthy," said Cormac. "Do you trust him? For my part I cannot yet tell whether he is a traitor or only a coward."

"You judge too harshly, lad," said O'Neill. "He is neither. His weakness is one which he shares with the major part of his countrymen; he is too obliging. He loves to be well thought of. The Queen or Cecyll has but to say to him: 'Excellent Florence, we have no doubt of your heartfelt loyalty,' and it will tear his heart to disappoint them."

"I cannot conceive it," said Cormac.

"You are of my own blood, lad. I ever hated their smiles even worse than their frowns, and would many times have cast their praises in their teeth did not my remoter purpose constrain me to dissimulation. 'S blood, how their 'loyal subject' jarred me to the very bones. . . . Let me not think on it. Where was I? Did I not speak of Florence?"

"You said he was too obliging."

"Yes. Too obliging, like the most part of our fond and foolish countrymen, with whom a word goes farther than fifty deeds. 'Tis no excess of virtue neither, this too obliging. 'Tis nearer selfishness than unselfishness, and nearer slothfulness than either. It takes the fine edge off his wit and unarms him to the enemy. Treachery he can foil, force he can circumvent, but flattery deludes and conquers him."

"Then do you regret his putting on?"

"No. For we too can say: 'Excellent Florence, we have no doubt of your heartfelt loyalty,' and the nearer flatterer may prove the dearer. At the worst we may count him neutral, but I have no doubt of his adherence when the Spaniards come."

"Why so?"

"Because much as he desires to be well thought of, he much more desires to be powerful. He will not risk Elizabeth's favour by joining in a rebellion whose issue is doubtful, but he will throw it to the winds to be King of Munster."

"I like not these obliging people," said Cormac. "I pray you, father, take me back with you to Ulster. I am but stupefied here."

"No, lad. You must show the Munstermen how to fight. O'Cahan shall take care of the obliging ones. . . . Pray God the Spaniards come soon," he added; and Cormac, looking at his face, noticed for the first time that he seemed worn and aged.

Next morning Cormac watched the departure of the Ulster army. They marched without music this time, and their banners were furled. Few people came to see them off, for the downpour was unceasing. It had rained all night; it was still raining, in cold, heavy, soaking torrents; it looked as if it would go on raining for ever. The road was six inches deep in thick brown clinging mud, through which the drenched warriors grimly, gloomily plodded. Cormac felt a horrible aching at his heart as he watched them go. There they went, off to the valiant North, off to the fields of old renown, leaving him here lost among these incalculable Southerns. He watched them to the bend of the road; he waited till the sound of their marching was drowned in the remorseless rain-rush; then he turned back to Inniscarra, where the saturated flags and finery still hung heavy and miserable.

He called from their inadequate and now flooded tents a troop of twenty depressed and insubordinate bonnachts, and started at once on the ten mile ride to Innishannon. The foul weather continued and the roads were almost impassable. The journey took nearly three hours, and they arrived at last weary, drenched and dispirited. Cormac ordered the sergeant to billet the by now almost mutinous troopers on the village, and himself repaired to the principal inn.

"A fire! mine host," was his first command.

"You'll find that same upstairs," said the landlord, "and two gentlemen in your own plight drying themselves before it."

Cormac concluded at once that this must be young MacCarthy and his escort, so he hurried upstairs and opened the first door he came to. He was greeted at once by that queer smell that comes from drying clothes. Two men who were holding their soaked mantles to the blaze of a huge wood fire turned round at his entry. One was O'Sullivan Mór, the other Dermot Moyle.

"Where is young MacCarthy?" he asked at once.

"Are you from O'Neill?" asked O'Sullivan suavely.

"Yes," snapped Cormac, impatient and ill at ease.

"Then this is for you," said O'Sullivan, producing a letter from his sparrán.

It was addressed: *To whomsoever it might concern.* Cormac took it and tore it open. It was inscribed, *The Pallice, Desmond,* and ran as follows:—

Excellent Sir,

My duty most humbly remembered unto O'Neill. May it please you to convey unto the same that my son is fallen into a grievous sickness, to wit, the measles, and can in no wise travel without grave danger to his life. Therefore I send by my right trusty Uriaght, O'Sullivan Mór, my beloved brother, Dermot Moyle, to be pledge unto the Prince of Tir-Owen for my continued fidelity to the Holy Cause. And so hoping to be excused for a dereliction forced upon me by the hand of heaven, I humbly take leave.

Your most faithful and assured,

Florence MacCarthy.

Cormac crushed the letter wrathfully in his hand and turned on O'Sullivan.

"Measles!" he cried. "O proper tale! Do you expect me, sir, to believe the malady fell out so opportunely?"

"My duty, sir," replied O'Sullivan with unruffled serenity, "is to deliver my lord's letter, not to explain it."

"And your lord's duty, sir," retorted Cormac, "was to deliver us a hostage according to his oath, not one who, like Dermot, has ever taken our part. . . . Dermot, I am glad to see you, but, upon my soul, I will not take you as a hostage."

"I dare be bound to the utmost," said Dermot, "for my brother's fidelity."

"No doubt, Dermot, no doubt," said Cormac. "But we will not take our own friend as a hostage for him."

"MacCarthy Mór is not accustomed to giving pledges for his honour," said O'Sullivan.

"Then by Heaven I'll take one," said Cormac. "Your sword, sir."

"Come for it, boy," said O'Sullivan, drawing and putting himself on guard.

But Cormac, once so hot-headed, was now too old a soldier to be moved by a taunt.

"Resistance is useless," he said. "The town is full of my men, and two of them are on guard at the inn door. I would not put you to the indignity of arrest, so once again I ask for your sword, sir."

A sharp command ringing out in the street below gave emphasis to Cormac's words. After a moment's hesitation O'Sullivan surrendered his weapon and gave his parole not to escape.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Cormac. "Now let us make all speed to dry ourselves, for I am chilled to the bone. To-morrow, O'Sullivan, we set out for Castle Lishin; and you, Dermot, may return to the Pallice and tell Florence that we have our hostage."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH TWO PACKS FOLLOW THE FOX TO HIS LAIR.

"Certainly straw is a very vile thing to make an earl of."

So spoke Cormac to Conn and Owen, standing in a window of Castle Lishin overlooking the rich but monotonous plough-lands of Middle Desmond.

"If I were Dermot O'Connor," said Conn, "I would not wait upon the earl but would go and do some useful action on my own account."

"Bah! Dermot has his wife to beguile him now, and is content with a waiting game."

Owen yawned. "This Munster has a most enfeebling climate," he said. "I could almost like our inactivity."

"O love-lorn sluggard!" said Cormac. "Well, you have at least your dreams to pass the time with, and Conn here has so many campaigns on his back that he is aged and loves a rest. But I—why my sword itches so that I cannot sleep o' nights. O to be in Ulster, say I."

It was the summer of the year 1600. Several months had passed since O'Neill's return to the North, and Munster had been quiet all that time. Irish law held undisputed sway throughout the province. The great lords, Irish and Anglo-Irish, lived in their recovered castles and administered their territories as in ancient times. They seemed in fact to regard the war as over, and to think they had nothing to do but enjoy the fruits of victory. To the presence of English forces in Cork, Kinsale and Kilmallock they were blind or oblivious, if not worse, for already rumours were abroad of streams of English gold flowing by tortuous channels into the Irish camp. The

jealousies and feuds, too, between clan and clan and lord and lord now began to revive, and great rifts appeared in the confederacy that for a moment had seemed so united. Whatever the cause, the result was only too obvious. On one excuse or another the great lords began to withdraw their followers from the army; Cork, Kinsale and Kilmallock were left in English hands, and the war languished. The Earl of Desmond was either too weak to compel his adherents to push it to the uttermost, or too stupid to recognise the necessity of doing so.

And if the Munster lords paid so little attention to the enemy at their own gates, it is not surprising that they felt no disquiet at certain events in the North which should have warned them against premature confidence. It seemed that O'Neill had at last met his match in the field. The new deputy, Mountjoy, had begun a fresh invasion of Ulster and won some ground on the scene of his predecessors' bloodiest disasters; and, more ominous still, the inviolate northern territory had been penetrated from the sea and an English fort stood on the soil of Tir-Owen. It was no wonder that Cormac itched for his native battlefields.

Meanwhile Donal MacCarthy lived quietly on the estate he had inherited, where he still supported a few of his bonnachts; and Florence maintained an ambiguous position in the territories of MacCarthy Mór. That wily chieftain was a puzzle and a heartsore both to the Irish leaders and the enemy in Cork. He had recalled within his jurisdiction every member of his sept—even to the zealous Dermot Moyle—who had joined the army of the Earl; then he had strengthened and garrisoned every pass and stronghold in his country, and ever since he had done nothing. To repeated requests from O'Connor to co-operate with him in an attack on Cork he had simply replied that no risk should be taken until the arrival of the Spaniards—a perfectly legitimate attitude, yet open to the suspicion of being merely an excuse.

"The fellow is a plain traitor," said O'Connor to O'Cahan, while Cormac and his friends were holding the conversation already recorded in another room.

"I do not think so," said O'Cahan; "and yet I hold him in heavy doubt. I used to think I had a keen eye and a cunning wit, yet Florence takes my subtlest baits for tit-bits, smiles his way out of every dilemma, and walks among my snares with an assurance born either of the deepest craft or the purest innocence—though for the life of me I cannot tell which."

"Say the former," muttered O'Connor.

"Wait. You shall judge for yourself. I wrote to him a week ago telling him that we had learned that the garrison of Cork intended a sally; that we had barely enough men to meet it; and that if he would but bring five hundred men to our help he would turn our doubtful resistance into an overwhelming victory which would annihilate the garrison and deliver the city into our hands. In addition I enclosed him O'Neill's last letter, that in which he begged for some action in the south to ease the pressure on Ulster. Well, sir, there was an issue he could scarce evade without showing himself a traitor, and yet he found a way. Listen now to his answer."

He drew a letter from his pocket and began to read.

"'Sir,' says he, 'your plan is bold, but it lacks wisdom and it stakes too much on hazard. If I march to your help I shall have to weaken my garrisons and leave my passes open to the English in Kilmallock, and my ports, where by God's will I hope the Spaniards will presently land, exposed to the attacks of certain ships of war that do narrowly watch them. But I have another plan whereby less may be risked and even more gained than by yours. Do you immediately assail Kilmallock, and when the army of Cork goes to its relief I will fall upon their flank and utterly destroy them. I ask but two days' notice wherein to gather men for the service. My duty to O'Neill,' etcetera, etcetera. Now, sir," cried O'Cahan, "find me a flaw in that to show the writer a traitor."

"He knows we are too weak to attack Kilmallock."

"He knows we are strong enough for a feint; and if the English really did mean to sally from Cork his is the plan of a prudent and skilful soldier."

"You are making excuses for the fellow," said O'Connor.

"I love the man," answered O'Cahan. "He's a very marvel of adroitness, and I would willingly think well of one whose skill far surpasses my own."

"Hold," said O'Connor. "I see a way by which to unmask him. To-morrow I'll march into his country for forage and maintenance. Thus he will be offered the choice of either welcoming us and so declaring against the Queen, or opposing us and becoming openly our enemy. What think you of that?"

"Dermot," said O'Cahan, "thou art a Machiavel and I am a fool. I was so set upon subtlety that this simplicity did not occur to me. Will you start to-morrow?"

While this conversation was taking place at Castle Lishin, another discussion on the same subject was in progress within the walls of Cork, where the new Lord President of Munster had called into consultation on the question of Florence's loyalty the discerning intelligence of Miler MacGrath, Archbishop of Cashel.

Sir George Carewe was a lithe, active man, carrying his middle age youthfully—a typical Elizabethan adventurer; remorseless, resolute, unscrupulous; a convicted murderer, amongst other things; a master of the black arts of government; and therefore a very fitting person for the post to which he had been appointed.

"My lord archbishop," he said to MacGrath, "I have summoned you hither because it is reported that you are intimately acquainted with one who is to me a perpetual source of questioning and bewilderment—I mean Florence MacCarthy."

"The man is a traitor," said MacGrath without hesitation.

"So do I think at times," said Carewe; "and yet at other times I doubt."

"Have no doubt," counselled the archbishop sagely. "I know him well, Sir George; a fellow of greater skill in

the devising of knavish tricks than the arch-traitor Tyrone himself."

"I grant you," said Carewe. "Yet, were he truly a traitor he would know now that his cause would be better served at this time by boldness than by temporising. If he were to join whole-heartedly with James FitzThomas their united strength would wrest from us all that we have left in Munster. Yet he still holds himself aloof in Desmond, and daily writes to me protesting his loyalty, but begging to be excused from taking the field for the present."

"On what grounds?"

"That his rebellious clansmen would not follow him against the traitors."

"'Tis a most plausible excuse," said MacGrath; "and I do not doubt there is truth in it. Yet 'tis not his main reason for all that. I'll swear he's false."

"Then why joins he not with James Fitz-Thomas?"

"Because he is a coward," said MacGrath. "He fears the might of her most puissant Majesty, and will not stir against her until he has received the promised aid from the King of Spain."

"I would I knew his mind," said Carewe. "He hangs like a dark thunder-cloud over my head. I dare not proceed against the other traitors while he remains doubtful."

"I have no doubts of him," said MacGrath. "But I have thought of a way to dissipate yours."

"Reveal it then, I beseech you," said Carewe.

The archbishop folded his hands and raised his eyes for a moment, as if praying for light

"It ill beseems me," he said, "a minister of the word of the Lord, to be the advocate of bloody courses."

"No doubt, no doubt," assented Carewe impatiently. "But when cruel, unnatural papist traitors are in arms against her most gracious majesty——"

"'Twas but a passing hesitation," MacGrath interrupted. "I will unfold my plan. Did not Moses himself pray for the smiting of the Amalekites, and was not his prayer answered? And are not these papist rebels more hateful in the eyes of the Lord even than the sons of

Amalek? Bear with me. I will be brief. You know, Sir George, that many of the gentry and common folk of Carbery were in action in this rebellion until Florence drew them out of it?" Carewe nodded. "Well, they have never been punished for their wickedness. What if you were to send troops to chastise them now? Carbery is not like Desmond. 'Tis an open country, easily reached from here. A thousand men will lay it waste in a day, and in doing so they will put a hard test upon Master Florence's loyalty, making him choose, without time for plotting or preparation, between the rebels and the Queen."

Carewe seized the archbishop's hand in a spasm of grateful admiration.

"I will go see about it," he said. "Stay you here awhile and we will dine together."

And so it was that when Dermot O'Connor, with Cormac and four hundred men, entered the land of Carbery a sight met their eyes that froze the songs on their lips and set their hearts beating with vengeful fury. As far as the eye could see stretched a broad blackened belt of burnt and ravaged country, the too-familiar track of an English army.

"On, boys!" cried Cormac, every fibre in his body tingling madly. "We'll have revenge for this. See, that house still burns. The plunderers cannot be far off. Come! We'll glut our swords ere night."

Spurred on by the sight of some slaughtered bodies, the little army, thirsting with hate, hurried forward. For ten miles they followed that sickening trail of destruction. Every house they passed was a wreck, every cornfield was trampled and ruined. The dead lay everywhere—men, women and children indiscriminately butchered. Slaughtered cattle, too, were frequent; and in one place they came upon a small lake choked with the bodies of a herd that had been driven into it.

"The Queen is for testing Florence, too," said O'Con-

nor, but Cormac made no answer. His rage was too great for speech.

Presently the advanced scouts came riding in with their reports. The enemy, they announced, had halted and was encamped by the village of Rosscarbery, three miles away. His number was something over a thousand. Cormac wanted to attack at once, but O'Connor would not hear of it.

"They are nearly three to one," he said. "We must wait for Florence; and, by God, if he comes in any force we have the devils in a trap."

"I'll fetch him," said Cormac.

"Do," said O'Connor, and added: "Letters are useless with him."

The enemy halted and prepared to bivouac for the night. Cormac set off at once, and, giving a wide berth to Rosscarbery, took the road for Carriganass, where Florence was known to be residing at the time. This would have meant a ride of nearly twenty miles into the mountains of Bantry, but fortunately, when he had travelled less than half of the distance, he encountered the chief himself hastening south with a troop of horsemen.

Cormac began to tell his news at once, but Florence checked him.

"I know, I know," he said. "It is for that very reason I have come out."

A weight lifted itself off Cormac's heart. Florence was for Ireland after all.

"We've brought our men to help you," he said. "They are over beyond Rosscarbery. We'll catch the butchers between two fires."

"We will," said Florence with so little enthusiasm that Cormac looked at his face anxiously. There was nothing to be read there, so he rode on by the chief's side in silence.

Night was already falling, and when he came within a couple of miles of Rosscarbery Florence halted and ordered his men to bivouac. A tent was set up for the chief, who invited Cormac to share it. The latter wondered whether his host bore him any ill-will for his action

in arresting O'Sullivan Mór, but Florence appeared to have forgotten it. He discussed plans of action with the younger man, to whose opinion he listened with grave respect, and thereby won, almost without that hero's consciousness, a fresh place in his esteem. It was agreed that to attack the English would be madness, for Florence's force only numbered two hundred: instead they would blockade them. The enemy's supply of provisions could not be large; in two days at most they would have to march away, and the superior skill of the Irish in defensive warfare would make a crushing victory certain. Of course, it was Florence's plan, but he so manœuvred the conversation as to make it appear to be Cormac's; and in high good humour that young man rode over next morning to his own camp to commend it to O'Connor.

The latter thoroughly approved, though he still retained more than a little of his distrust for Florence. That day the two Irish leaders drew their forces somewhat closer together, so that the same distance—about three miles—was between them as between each of them and the enemy. For a week the English made no move, and the Irish lay grimly waiting for them. The blockade proved a very trying one, for owing to the devastated condition of the immediate neighbourhood the foraging parties had to wander far afield, and the supplies they brought in were scanty. Still the realisation that the enemy's case must be even worse held them patiently in their lines.

At last one morning O'Connor rode over to hold counsel with Florence. When he reached his position he gave a start of surprise to see that chieftain coming up from the direction of the enemy's camp attended by two followers, one of whom carried a white flag.

"Where have you been?" he demanded sharply, unable to control the suspicion in his voice. Florence, however, took no offence, but with his pleasant smile said he had been to parley with the enemy.

"To what end?" cried O'Connor.

"To see what I could make of their strength," replied Florence patiently. "There are more of them than your

scouts reported, Dermot. They are close on fourteen hundred."

"My lord," said Dermot, "an honest man does not parley with the enemy without holding counsel with his colleague."

"Sir," said Florence stiffly, "I am MacCarthy Mór, and act as I choose, and by leave of no captain of bonnachts."

Dermot's wrath began to rise.

"Beware, my lord," he said, "lest you say what you shall be sorry for."

"Sir," said Florence, "you have already said what you should be sorry for."

Dermot made no answer. His eye had been caught by some distant movement of the enemy.

"By God!" he cried. "They are on the march! and half my men are miles away foraging." He turned savagely on Florence. "Traitor!" he shouted. "This is your doing." And putting spurs to his horse he galloped away to his own lines.

The fear uppermost in his mind was that that rash boy Cormac would face those fourteen hundred men with his own poor two hundred. But he wronged his lieutenant. Cormac was already withdrawing out of harm's way, detaching small bodies of skirmishers to harrass the enemy, and had sent messengers to recall the foragers.

"Good lad!" said Dermot when he reached his side, and then began cursing his luck at having to stand helplessly by while his prey walked unscathed out of his carefully-laid trap.

"Never mind," said Cormac. "The foragers will be in soon, and then we'll hang on their heels and kill what we can."

But it was three hours before their whole force was assembled, and by then the enemy were half way to Kinsale and safety. The Irish of those days were, however, remarkable for their fleetness of foot, and the English troops were burdened with spoil, so that by tremendous exertions the hounds of vengeance succeeded in running down their quarry late in the afternoon.

Casting their weariness aside they flung themselves on the English rear-guard and smashed it in bloody rout, but the main body only strove all the more hurriedly to reach a place of safety.

"Stand!" cried Cormac, beside himself with rage, apostrophising from a hillock the backs of enemies half a mile away. "Stand, you dogs, and fight!"

The backs remained unresponsive. The English plodded on, many of them discarding their bundles of loot, and the Irish loped wearily after them. At last when it seemed that the chase could go on no longer, since both pursuers and pursued were ready to drop in their tracks, the English discerned a refuge ahead. It was a ruined castle surrounded by a dry ditch. To it they made a last desperate rush, and there stood, panting and exhausted, at bay.

Sheltered by some trees hard by, the Irish took breath for the attack. O'Connor and Cormac ran up and down marshalling the lines. Some madness must have taken possession of them to make them thus ready to fling four hundred men against twice that number. O'Connor, at any rate, was already in the first stages of his battle-wrath.

"Charge!" he yelled at length, waving his sword—the same from which the hilt had been cut away after the battle of Tyrrell's Pass.

"Charge!" cried Cormac, and with a vengeful roar the Irish rushed upon the trench.

The English opened a hot fire at once, and as they crossed the open ground the attackers lost heavily. But they came on. They reached the trench. Broadswords and battleaxes clashed with clubbed musket, bill and partisan. Yells of wrath and pain hurtled in the air In one place the Irish gained ground for a time: the point where the berserker fury of O'Connor felled foes in heaps. Never was fighting seen like this. He was transfigured: a demon. With one blow he would cut a man in two; with another he would bite through armour into the heart beneath; with a third he would slay two foes at once. His sword played like a magic flail: it flashed death everywhere, and

let nothing near the wielder. And so, at the apex of a dense wedge of his men he cut a way deep into the English line.

Cormac, in his part of the field, had not fared so well. Good swordsman as he was he could not prevail against the odds, and while crossing the open ground he had received a bullet in the shoulder which sadly hampered him. Like waves of the sea he and his men raged against the dense line of the English, but they, like the rocks, broke them in froth. And the strong right arm of O'Connor could not remain unwearied for ever. He too received a wound; the wedge of his followers was cut through and through, and it was with difficulty that he fought his way out of the press. The attack was a failure, and the Irish could only retreat to their old position, leaving a third of their number behind them.

And now the English cavalry came to complete the victory. Down they swept, three hundred glittering sabres, on the beaten and exhausted Irish, who, at the sight of them, broke and fled in panic. Massacre must be the inevitable sequel, thought Dermot and Cormac, who, having stood their ground in the general wreck, now remained deserted by friend and foe. But even as they looked back they saw a wonderful sight. Down from the high ground to the north swept a new body of cavalry, and charged straight for the enemy's flank.

"My God, Cormac! Did you see?" cried Dermot. "The man in front! Florence MacCarthy!"

It was indeed the chief of Clan Carthy, whose gigantic figure towered above the turmoil of battle. Before him the English at once gave way, like the Trojans before the face of Achilles. Back they came rushing in total rout, and the two Ulstermen only saved themselves from being trampled to death by getting behind a tree.

The battle was over. Florence unaccountably did not push his advantage, and O'Connor's men were too demoralised for further action. The general himself instantly sought out Florence, who had dismounted to examine a wound in his horse's breast.

"My lord," he said, "I come to crave your forgive-

ness. For my hasty words this morning I am most heartily sorry."

Florence looked as if something he had forgotten had been suddenly recalled to his memory.

"He who has never been offended can never forgive," he said.

O'Connor looked puzzled and a little humiliated.

"Will you not shake hands?" he asked.

"O that!" said Florence carelessly, and complied with indifference. It was their left hands that clasped each other, for their right arms hung helpless by their sides.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH CORMAC AND OWEN ENTER THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

Some days after the skirmish in Carbery, when the army had returned to Castle Lishin, Owen came to Cormac with a troubled expression on his face.

"I want your advice," he said.

"Faith," said Cormac, "you are the first that ever asked that of me. 'Tis said I need all I can get for myself. However, what wisdom I have is at your service. Proceed."

"You know," said Owen, blushing somewhat, "that Sir George Carewe has now been in Cork above six weeks."

"I do," said Cormac, with a knowing smile.

"Well," said Owen, "the week after he arrived I wrote to—to Marjorie asking her to meet me at a certain house outside the gates of Cork on whatever day she should choose, and promising to carry her off to the nearest church and marry her. Five weeks ago that letter was sent, yet I have received no reply."

"Perhaps it was not delivered to her."

"O yes it was. I sent it by one of my most trusty men, who in disguise entered the city and put it into her own hand."

"Well then she has ceased to love you."

Owen flushed deeper than before and made a gesture of protest.

"That cannot be," he said, "for I received a most loving message from her the day after she landed."

"Perhaps her guardian discovered her intent and has confined her to his house."

"Your conjecture leaps with mine," said Owen. "I could swear 'tis so, and it means that I must e'en break into her prison for her."

"And you want my help?"

"Aye, and Conn's. There may be fighting, and if so three swords are better than one. Are you for me?"

Cormac gave him his hand. They then went to find Conn, who readily agreed to join in the enterprise.

"And now," said Owen, "how are we going to get into Cork?"

It was a difficult problem. They discussed a dozen different plans, some bad, some good, but all involving risks which, though they would willingly have run them on their own account, they considered too much for the lady. At last Cormac said:

"'Tis very plain that we cannot get into the place from the land side, for the English expect to be attacked there, and are therefore on their guard. But why not try to get in by sea? 'Tis what they call their own element, and they don't fear us there."

"What? must we swim for it?" asked Conn.

"No, thou addle-pate. I'll tell you how we'll do it. You know that the fisherfolk of the coasts around here bring most of their wares into Cork, and for that purpose sail right up the estuary into the city."

"Yes," said Owen. "I have seen them do it."

"Well," said Cormac, "why should we not don fisherman's attire and enter by the same way?"

The plan was greeted with acclamation and immediately put into effect. In the quiet conditions prevailing for the moment in Munster they had no difficulty in obtaining a week's leave of absence from O'Connor; and, having secured suitable disguises and a spare horse, they rode south forthwith. The little village of Gyleen, situated at the mouth of the estuary of the Lee, was the spot chosen as the starting point of the venture. After some search for a likely man they hit at length upon one Tadg Ruadh,

a lean, hungry-looking mariner with a wonderful gift of silence, who was very ready to lend his services and ask no questions, in return for what was to him a small fortune, and to earn the prodigious reward promised in the event of success. As there was every likelihood of the fugitives being pursued it was arranged that Conn would remain in the village and keep the horses always in readiness; and next morning Cormac and Owen took their places with Tadg in the scaly fish-smelling little boat, and sailed away on their quest. Along with several similar craft they passed innocently by the patrolling English warships, and glided up the winding island-studded estuary without mishap or adventure. Then after warning Tadg to remain ever at his post, they landed on the quay and walked up into the city.

They found it swarming with English soldiers, for the new Lord President had brought considerable reinforcements with him; and the two Ulstermen were surprised that with such numbers no attempt had been made to regain Munster for the Queen. They wasted no time on these speculations, however. Their first care was to seek out a clothier's shop, where they fitted themselves out in the garb of sober, respectable citizens—Cormac reeling off an ingenious tale of a fishing accident to explain their present attire to the satisfaction of the clothier and his assistants. This accomplished, they sought out the best inn in the town, where they ordered dinner and began to discuss their next step.

"Now, Owen," said Cormac. "You are brave, and a good swordsman, and an accomplished gentleman, and everything that make a man shine in the eyes of the ladies. You are resourceful, too, on the battlefield, but you lack something that is badly needed in an adventure such as this. You have never had to try your wits against people like the Lady Ellen MacCarthy and her lord, and if you did you would be beaten. You are neither quick nor subtle: you are nearly as big a fool as I was two years ago. Therefore, my friend, leave the first nosings-out and surveillances to me. Then when all is clear you may fly like Cupid's arrow to your lady's side."

"Most willingly," said Owen. "Only for you I should never have got here."

As soon as he had satisfied his hunger, Cormac went out, to return in a couple of hours beaming with triumph.

"All's well," he said, carrying Owen off to their private room. There he threw himself into a chair, legs a-sprawl, and, curling his moustaches, said: "'Tis a good thing to be a handsome man. I found the house without difficulty, knocked boldly, and was admitted by a neat little serving-maid. 'Was Master Thomas Roche at home?' said I. 'Oh, no,' says she. 'This is Sir Thomas Stafford's house.' 'A lucky man,' say I. 'Why?' says she. 'To have so sweet and fair an attendant,' say I. In ten minutes she was mine. Could you have done as much, O constant swain? She told me all I wanted to know, and a plaguey lot of dull gossip besides. But her tale in brief is this: that Mistress Marjorie is a most sweet lady; that Sir Thomas is a churl; that, having surprised her in the act of writing a letter to a certain wild Irishman, he has kept her confined in her room ever since; that this churl is seldom at home, and sups to-night with Sir Warham St. Leger; that for love of her mistress, sweetened with some fair promises of mine, she will admit the said wild Irishman to the house at nine to-night; and that the lock of the lady's door is such as a strong shoulder may easily break."

"Cormac," said Owen rapturously, "thou art the very prince of conspirators. How can I thank thee?"

"'Tis nothing," said Cormac.

"Stay," said Owen. "I'll show you a sight that will make you bless me for ever. Come here."

He seized Cormac by the arm and led him to the window. It looked down into a quaint old flower-garden, with a fountain and some apple trees in it. Sitting on the edge of the fountain, bathed in the golden sunlight of the afternoon, was a woman, at the sight of whose black hair and perfect profile Cormac gave a violent start.

"Owen!" he said. "Do you know who it is? . . . 'Tis the Lady Ellen MacCarthy."

Owen gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"What can she be doing in Cork?" he said.

"Nothing good, I'll warrant," said Cormac. "Owen, we must keep a watch on this fair lady."

"She goes here by the name of Mistress Cusack," said Owen. "I found that out while you were away. She arrived late last night, and has taken the two rooms underneath this."

"Belike she has some appointment with someone," said Cormac. "I shall not lack employment while you are winning your lady."

The two young men whiled away the rest of the day as best they could. When the shades of evening fell the Lady Ellen shut herself up in her room, but at eight o'clock, accompanied by a female attendant, she came down to supper in the public dining-room. She took a table remote from that occupied by the Ulstermen, who had chosen one by the window, whence they had a view of the street. She did not recognise Cormac in his disguise; indeed, she scarcely glanced at him, but Cormac observed her closely, and, from her nervous demeanour and habit of looking up whenever the door opened, deduced that she was expecting someone at any moment.

Suddenly Owen, who had been looking out of the window, said:

"Cormac, do you know who is coming towards the hotel? I could swear it, though 'tis five years since I saw him."

"Who?" said Cormac.

"Sir George Carewe."

On the instant realisation and a purpose flashed into Cormac's active brain.

"Owen," he said in a low voice, "I must act quickly. Stay here for the present, and when the time comes to go for your lady I will follow as soon as I can." Then, for the benefit of Lady Ellen, he shook hands warmly with his friend and left the room.

He went upstairs immediately. He guessed that Carewe had come to see Lady Ellen, and had no doubt that the interview would take place in her private room. Thither he hurried accordingly. No one was about; the door was

unlocked, and he entered noiselessly. He looked around the room seeking for a hiding place, but there was none. The walls were bare, the furniture scanty, there was not even a screen. He thought for a moment of the window curtains, but they proved too skimpy for his stalwart figure. Then he noticed another door communicating with the bedroom. He passed through, shut it carefully, and waited in breathless suspense.

Twenty minutes passed, then steps were heard ascending the stairs. Cormac deemed it prudent to get under the bed, where he softly drew his dagger. The steps entered the sitting-room. Cormac heard voices—a man's and a woman's. Someone opened the bedroom door for an instant, and then closed it again. The conversation in the next room recommenced. Cormac stole from his hiding place and stealthily put his ear to the keyhole.

Lady Ellen was speaking.

"My lord," she said in English, "you wrong him. I'll stake my soul that he is loyal."

"A sickly loyalty!" said Carewe in the same language. Cormac wondered what the man was like. His voice was of ignoble quality. "If he is loyal," he went on, "why does he call himself by the attainted title of MacCarthy Mór? Why does he attack her Majesty's troops in the fulfilment of their duty? Why are my letters, summoning him to fall upon the rebels, disregarded? Why does he refuse to come here and hold parley with me?"

"He fears that your lordship, misunderstanding his actions, might cast him into prison."

"I sent him a safe conduct."

"Alas! your lordship, we Irish have sad experience of English safe conducts."

"What!" said Carewe angrily. "Dares he mistrust the pledge of the Queen's honour?"

"My lord," said the lady diplomatically, "in that, but in that alone, he smacks somewhat of the rebel. But believe me, your lordship, you wrong him. I will answer all your questions to prove it to you. You know that he was sent by the Queen for the sole purpose of withdrawing Clan Carthy from this wicked rebellion, and to that

end he was given full permission to parley with rebels. I assure your lordship that he hates the name MacCarthy Mór as strongly as any other good subject, but he could not gain the headship of the sept without assuming it; for that unnatural traitor, my base brother Donal, by his usurpation of it had already led many of the meaner sort of the people into his wicked action, and only by taking the title from him could Florence recall them to their duties."

"This is most plausible," said Carewe. "But to the other questions: why did he attack her Majesty's troops in Carbery last week?"

"My lord, they came like ravening wolves into our land, spoiling the homes of our harmless people, and slaughtering our poor churls with their women and children. If a chief does not protect his people the days of his rule are numbered."

"Madam," said Carewe, "the Queen is the gracious protector of all her liege subjects, and when she sends her soldiers to punish rebels she expects help, not hindrance, from those she has raised to power. Why does not Florence obey my request to attack the traitors in Desmond?"

"Because his men would not follow him if he did."

"Pah! You Irish are all rebels. Now mark what I say. You know what is the end of all traitors. You know what became of the late Earl of Desmond, who was plagued with fire, sword and famine, was hunted miserably to his death, and lost all his lands to his heirs for ever. And be assured that if Florence proceeds in any further traitorous action he will have the like end; and you, as his wife, will lose your lands, too—even those that came to you by your father—and you will be left with your children as beggars and outcasts."

"Oh, my lord! he is innocent. What can I do to prove it to you?"

"He is a rebel, and you cannot prove it otherwise. The good Archbishop of Cashel told me that he had converse with envoys of Tyrone even before the battle of the Yellow Ford."

"They prevailed nothing with him," said the lady.

"Then why did he not deliver them to her Majesty? No, my lady, you cannot prove your husband's innocence. But," tentatively, "you can do something to mitigate his guilt."

"What can I do?" asked the lady, a note of hope in her voice.

"Your husband is dear to you, is he not?" observed Carewe.

"Dearer than life itself."

"Well, I will promise you to save his life, which will surely be forfeited when this wicked rebellion is overcome. I will save his life and I will preserve your lands if . . ." he paused.

"If?"

"What would you do for that?"

"Anything you ask."

"Then will you truly report to me any dealings he has with the rebels?"

There was silence for a moment. Then the lady spoke.

"As you will, my lord," she said.

Cormac could not hear Carewe's next remark, which was delivered in a very low voice, but he could guess its import from Lady Ellen's answer.

"Sir," she said, with freezing scorn, "do you think that the wife of MacCarthy Mór could ever stoop to *you?*"

Cormac could not help smiling at the sudden change of temper indicated both by the tone and the words of this answer. Carewe must have realised the futility of his plea, for a few minutes later both he and Lady Ellen left the room; and Cormac, horribly cramped by his position at the keyhole, emerged from his hiding place. His heart was heavy. There could no longer be any doubt that Florence was false; and as for Lady Ellen's conduct, it wrung from the rawness of his youthful soul a bitter generalisation about the love of woman.

After waiting to give Carewe time to take his departure he set out towards Stafford's house to render what help might be necessary to his friend.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH SIR THOMAS STAFFORD MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE NOT RECORDED IN THE "PACATA HIBERNIA."

Meanwhile Owen had remained in the dining-room, where he had seen the meeting of Carewe and Lady Ellen. After their departure to her private room he waited for some time in the hope that Cormac might rejoin him. But when quarter of an hour had gone by he could restrain his impatience no longer. What if Sir Thomas should return from his supper party sooner than expected? he asked himself; and with that fear gripping him he hurried out at once into the street. The task before him was a tough one, even for two to manage. He had learnt from Cormac that the servants in the house numbered five—three maids, including their ally, and two men. His sword, as being incompatible with the disguise assumed, had been left behind at Gyleen, and his only weapon—besides a pistol, which he dare not use—was a dagger. He might, however, hope that the servants would be unarmed, and he had the sanguine temperament that does not think of difficulties until they arise.

Following Cormac's directions he easily found Sir Thomas's house, and rapped softly on the door. It was opened immediately by the pretty little Anglo-Irish maid, who smiled on seeing him, and put a finger to her lips. She drew him cautiously inside and shut the door.

"The maid servants," she whispered, "are in the kitchen, the butler is in the pantry, and the other man is on guard outside Mistress Marjorie's door."

"Armed?" asked Owen anxiously.

"With a pistol," said the maid. Owen's heart sank. "Sir Thomas put him there," went on the girl, "and told him not to stir till he came home."

Owen decided to ignore this difficulty for the present. Cormac would soon come along and solve it. Meanwhile a beginning must be made somewhere.

"Where is the pantry?" he whispered.

The girl pointed to a door at the far end of the hall. Owen drew his pistol from under his cloak, loosened his dagger, and tip-toed slowly in that direction. He reached the door, opened it swiftly and silently, darted within, and stood with his back to it, covering with his pistol a portly, middle-aged man who sat at a table cleaning silver in the lamplight.

"Hands up!" commanded Owen.

The man, startled into an involuntary exclamation, obeyed, trembling.

"One word—one sound," said Owen, "and you are a dead man. Keep up your hands and kneel down."

The butler did so.

"Now," said Owen, "lower one hand to steady yourself, lie face downwards on the floor, and stretch out both hands above your head."

Again the butler obeyed. Owen put his knee in the small of the man's back, laid his pistol on the floor within easy reach, and, drawing a piece of rope from his pocket, bound the man's hands together and fastened them to his belt behind. Then he gagged the fellow with a piece of wood and one of his own dish-cloths, and, leaving him lying on the floor, passed out of the pantry, which he locked.

"So far so good," he said to his fair ally, when he emerged. "Now for the kitchen."

Following her directions he went down a flight of stairs and along a passage to a door, from behind which came the unmistakeable sounds of dish-washing, mingled with female voices. He had to be more careful in his entry this time, for a shriek might undo everything. Keeping his pistol behind his back he walked quietly into the room and said: "Good-night, girls."

One of them was washing dishes at a sink, the other cleaning knives at a table in the centre of the room. They looked up at Owen, startled, but not over-frightened.

"I mean you no harm, girls," said the young man, "but I must command you not to utter a sound. If you do . . ." he paused significantly and showed them the handle of his pistol.

The girls were thoroughly frightened now, and would have liked to seek relief in screams if they had dared. Owen looked round the room until his eye fell on the door of a closet containing fuel and other things.

"I am sorry to seem churlish," he said, "but in here you must go. . . . 'Twill not be for long," he added by way of consolation.

The girls had no choice but to obey.

"Fear nothing," said Owen, "so long as you remain silent. But if you utter the slightest sound it will be your last."

Then he bolted the door and rejoined his ally in the hall. He had carried out his work so quietly that the sentinel at the top of the house had heard nothing. In order to be able to converse more easily the two conspirators entered the nearest room and shut the door.

"What can I do with that fellow?" asked Owen. "One shot from his pistol will bring the whole neighbourhood about our ears. Does he drink?"

"Ay," said the girl, "but soberly. Never have I known him exceed what one may take with safety."

"A plague on these trustworthy servants!" said Owen.

"Mayhap the pistol does not lie handy to his reach," said the girl. "He has been on guard more than an hour now, and might be weary."

"Most likely," said Owen joyfully. "Then by a swift rush I might grip him ere he could use it."

"I'll go and see," said the girl, and ran upstairs at once.

On the topmost landing of the house, a narrow uncarpeted space, dimly lit by a single lantern that hung from the ceiling, a thick-set, bullet-headed man sat on a chair with his back to a door, idly whistling a mono-

tonous and unrecognisable tune. A pistol, a long and cumbrous weapon, lay across his knees.

"Well, Michael, art comfortable?" asked the girl when she saw him.

"O, 'tis thou, Sara!" he growled. "When art thou bringing my supper, lass?"

"I came to ask you when you would like to have it," replied Sara.

"At once, in God's name," said the man. "I am hungry and aweary."

"Anon, anon!" answered Sara, and ran downstairs again.

"He is very vigilant, and keeps his pistol to his hand," she said to Owen. "But mayhap he will lay it aside when I fetch him his supper."

She went down to the kitchen, leaving Owen by himself. He was very downhearted now, and felt that his only hope lay in the immediate arrival of the resourceful Cormac. Even as he came to that conclusion he heard a gentle tap on the hall door.

It could only be his friend. In a moment he had the door open, and Cormac stepped inside. Rapidly Owen told him how matters stood, and begged him to think of a scheme.

"A scheme!" said Cormac. "Do you think that schemes grow in my head like eggs in a hen? I can only think of a way if a way exists, and I fear there is no way to move this fellow but by force."

"But if he fires one shot we are ruined."

"No. 'Twill be some time ere anyone gathers to the spot. I'll creep as close to him as I can. Then, while we grapple, break in the door and be off with your lady as quick as you can."

"Nay," said Owen. "'Tis I must grapple with the fellow. This venture is mine, and mine should be the peril."

"Go to," said Cormac. "And if you be killed what am I to do with your lady? Tush man! The hazard is small, and I'll chance it."

"I like it not," said Owen.

At this moment Sara reappeared from the kitchen carrying a savoury dish of hashed mutton, some bread, and a tankard of beer on a tray.

"Whose is the supper?" asked Cormac.

Sara explained.

"Mayhap he will lay aside his pistol while he eats it," Owen added.

"Hold!" said Cormac, hit by a sudden inspiration.

"A plan?" inquired Owen anxiously.

"Ay," said Cormac. "By your leave, Sara," and to their utter astonishment he seized the tankard of beer and drained it at a draught. Then, taking the salt cellar, he spilled most of its contents into the hash. Owen was about to give vent to an exclamation of delight as the meaning of the act dawned on him, but Cormac held up a warning hand. Sara was more discreet. Mixing up the salt with the hash she ran upstairs to the hungry sentinel, who immediately laid his pistol on the floor and received the tray on his knee.

Sara tripped off again at once, and the watchman applied himself eagerly to the mutton.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed at the very first mouthful. "This is monstrously over-seasoned." But he was ravenously hungry, and the hash was hot and smelt appetisingly, so he made a brave attempt to finish it. Presently, however, he felt an urgent need of a drink, and uttered an ejaculation of disgust to find none on the tray. "Bother the girl!" he cried, as another mouthful made the slaking of his thirst imperative.

"Sara!" he called, but there was no answer. He put down the tray and went to the head of the stairs, where he called again. Still no answer.

"Sara!" he bawled, moving down the stairs. At the top of the second flight he shouted again, angrily this time, but the only reply that came to him was the echoing of his own voice.

Thoroughly exasperated, he ran down to the darkness of the next landing.

"Sar—*ah*!!"

A weight seemed suddenly to drop on him; something

crooked itself between his legs, he staggered and fell. A knee was pressed into his diaphragm, two hands gripped his throat with a clutch of steel, strangling the cry he tried to utter. That cry died away into a gurgle as his throat was crushed and squeezed by the tightening of those paralysing fingers. His breath came short and hard; there was a singing in his ears; his blood-vessels pulsed frightfully; all went black.

"Now, Owen, rush to the lady," said Cormac, as the watchman's body became limp.

Up the stairs went the ardent lover till he came to the locked door. Three mighty heaves from his shoulder smashed it down. Within stood his lady, trembling between fear and hope.

"Marjorie!" he cried.

With a little sob of relief she threw herself into his arms.

They were not left long to themselves. Presently Cormac appeared at the door, saying: "Time presses. Let Mistress Stafford pack up anything she needs, and let's begone."

Marjorie's wants were quickly supplied, and the three descended to the hall together. There they found Sara waiting for them, and all thanked her heartily for her assistance, while Marjorie presented her with a diamond necklace which she took from her own neck.

"But what is to become of me now?" asked the girl. "My part in this will be known."

"Not if I tie you up," said Cormac, producing a piece of rope.

"What about that supper I served for Michael?" she asked.

"No one need know about that," said Cormac. "He's dead."

"What?" cried Marjorie. "My own countryman—dead—for me?"

"Not for you, madam," replied Cormac. "Your countrymen and ours have been killing one another for many a long day. 'Twas but the fortune of war."

But Marjorie was unable to conceal her distress.

"O, sir, I wish you could have spared him," she said.

"It was my life or his," replied Cormac, a little nettled, and turning to Sara he said: "Run now and put that supper back in the kitchen."

The girl hurried off to do his bidding.

"Dearest," said Owen to his lady, "you have offended Cormac, to whom we owe everything. But for him you would be still in durance."

Marjorie stepped lightly towards Cormac, who stood some distance off, with his back turned, and, touching him on the shoulder, she said:

"Your pardon, sir. I am a woman, and must needs feel killing as a woman feels it."

Cormac faced round and took the hand she offered. Her face was the loveliest he had ever seen. Without having the classical beauty of the Lady Ellen's, it was infinitely more attractive in virtue of the strength and sweetness of soul that moulded its expression. Her eyes were blue, her hair brown and curling, her complexion fair and lightly sprinkled with freckles. There was no resisting her attitude of penitence.

Sara had now returned from her errand, and Cormac proceeded to bind her hands and feet. Then they carried her into an adjoining room and laid her on a sofa. Even as they did so they heard a knock at the hall door.

"'Tis Sir Thomas," said Sara, while Owen and Marjorie looked at one another in dismay.

Quickly Cormac issued his instructions.

"You, Owen, will open the door, keeping well out of sight while you do so. I will wait on the other side to spring on him as he enters. Then you must bang the door and come to my help."

Another knock echoed through the silent house. The two young men went out into the hall, Cormac turning down the lamp as they did so. Cautiously they took up their positions, and, as a third impatient knock rang out, Owen opened the door.

The person without stepped across the threshold, but advanced no farther.

"Now, then, William," he said, "why have I been kept waiting so long? And why are the lamps unlit?"

No answer came out of the deathly darkness of the house, and a premonition of ill must have clutched Sir Thomas. He took a step backward, and on the instant Owen, losing his head, tried to slam the door. A cry of pain came from Sir Thomas, caught between its edge and the post, but with a quick movement he extricated himself, and the door banged. Owen heard the sound of rending cloth, followed by retreating footsteps.

It should be explained that when Sir Thomas went out to supper that night he had donned his doublet of black satin studded with pearls, with voluminous trunks of the same material. It was the slack of these that had got caught in the door and had given way when he escaped. And so it was that when Owen rushed out immediately after he saw a stout little figure scurrying like a rabbit down the street (the simile rendered complete by the white shirt-tail fluttering behind him) and yelling "Murder!" at the top of his voice.

"We must fly at once," said Cormac, and returned quickly to the room where the women were. "Call for help as soon as anyone comes," he said to Sara. "'Twill seem more innocent."

Next minute the three were hurrying down the dark street towards the quays. The pursuit, if there was any, was at fault, and they reached them without adventure. The faithful Tadg was waiting with the boat. In silence they descended the steps and got on board. Tadg immediately pushed off. Then, propelled by the current, they glided rapidly downstream. As they reached the open sea the moon rose over Power Head, revealing in the distance the watchful ships of England. One altered its course so as to approach and take stock of them, but Tadg called out what his occupation was, and they were allowed to pass unmolested. Cormac had been correct in his surmise—nothing less than a Spanish galleon would have seemed suspicious in these waters.

The night was calm and warm, and the little boat rapidly and smoothly approached Gyleen. Reaching the

tiny landing stage they stepped ashore, and were immediately met by Conn with the horses. Then Tadg was paid his reward and the party prepared to start.

Suddenly Cormac, who had been straining his ears for the sound of pursuing oars, cried: "Listen!" They did so, and there came to their ears a distant but unmistakeable creak and splash.

"Away!" he cried. "These fellows don't matter; they have no horses. But the alarm is given, and the whole countryside will be scoured ere morning."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH HOOFS CLATTER AND SWORDS CLASH.

Having shaken off all danger of immediate pursuit by an hour's hard riding, the fugitives halted at a tiny village where there was an insignificant inn. There they dismounted, and, while a meal was being prepared, the landlord's son was sent to find a priest. The latter soon arrived—a ragged, unkempt man with a nervous air, acquired by living constantly in danger of torture and death. In a few minutes he had made Owen O'Ruairc and Marjorie Stafford man and wife, and, resisting all invitations to stay, hurried back to the cave where he lived.

Then the wedding feast was laid, and a joyous meal it proved. What if the food was course and badly served? What if the wine was sour and thin? Adventure and the sea air had given appetites that were not to be balked by such trifles; and the joy of a bold deed done and the happiness of young love transformed and glorified everything. So healths were drunk, and the bride made the prettiest little speech imaginable, interspersed with some phrases of Irish in a dainty English accent; and after a short rest the fugitives resumed their journey.

To avoid any search parties that might have been sent out from the city they had kept their course well to the east, and in that direction they now continued. After they had covered ten more miles Cormac began to look around him for a suitable refuge in which they might spend the remainder of the night. He found it at last—a deserted cottage somewhat removed from the roadside. There they slept until morning, the men taking turns to watch.

At daybreak Cormac and Owen and Marjorie were eating a hasty meal by a fire of sticks, when Conn, who had been on guard down the road, came in with the report that a body of English cavalry, perhaps a score in number, was approaching.

"Twenty," said Cormac. "Too many to fight. Off we go," and in a few seconds the party was mounted and cantering away.

As they crossed the brow of a hill a little further on, Cormac, glancing back, caught a glimpse of the pursuers trotting over the plain four miles distant. Instantaneously these sighted their quarry, and spurred their horses to a gallop; the fugitives did the same, and the chase began. For a while there was a straight run, during which it became obvious that the enemy's mounts were fresher, for they gained ground slowly but surely. Cormac now took the lead, bending his course steadily round towards the north-west, where, sooner or later, they must reach the Irish outposts. Meanwhile, like a fox, he tried every possible device to throw the hunters off the trail. Sometimes he led them across country, sometimes he kept to the roads, sometimes he plunged into tortuous bye-ways. Wherever he saw a narrow passage he headed for it, hoping thereby to comb out the solid bunch of the enemy with a view to the fight with which the chase might have to terminate, and soon he had the satisfaction of observing that he had succeeded in sundering their ranks. Some three or four were now ahead of the others, behind them pressed a larger body all in a lump, and behind these the remainder tailed off in units scattered over a mile.

But the leaders of the hunt were still gaining ground. Long before mid-day they had eaten up half of the distance separating them from the pursued. Then for an instant fortune favoured the latter; a scrubby dell away from the roadside offered them an asylum at a moment when their movements were screened from the enemy. Into it they dashed, and waited in breathless suspense. On swept the hunters along the road, and had covered two miles before they realised their mistake. By the time they had picked up the trail again their quarry

was well away on a new course, heading direct for the west and safety.

But the pursuit went on, and the pace of the fugitives, accommodated to the weakest of their number, began to flag. Once more the enemy gained on them, more rapidly this time, and soon Cormac realised that a stand must be made. While he revolved plans in his mind he kept his eye on the features of the country, and at last he discovered what he sought. Close to the road stood a small country house, long ago deserted and pillaged. It was surrounded by a walled garden, at the gate of which he reined in his horse, and called upon his friends to do the same.

"Listen!" he said. "This chase cannot last much longer. Do what I tell you quickly. I will hold this house against them. Ride you on to yonder wood, and leave the lady there. I'll kill what I can in the interval. Then come you down on the remainder and cut them in pieces. Begone now; give me your pistols and hats, and take my horse with you."

He dismounted quickly, flinging the reins of his steed to Conn. Owen would have protested, but Conn dragged him away, saying: "No time to argue," and urged both him and Marjorie towards the copse indicated by Cormac.

Swiftly the latter slipped through the gate and bolted it. Then he ran to the house, which stood, a picture of desolation, with windows broken and doors banging in the wind, in the midst of the wilderness that had been a garden. He bolted the doors and barricaded them with what furniture was left. Then after sticking the three hats prominently in different windows, he climbed to an attic that commanded the road and the gateway, loaded his six pistols and sat down to wait for the enemy.

Almost immediately the four leading horsemen appeared, and would have dashed on down the road had not Cormac fired off one of his pistols. At this they stopped at once, and must have come to the conclusion that they had run their prey to earth, for they drew off out of range to wait for their companions. Cormac meanwhile reloaded his pistol. In five minutes' time the main body of

the enemy arrived, bringing up their numbers to fifteen, and some of them began riding round the garden wall, inspecting both it and the house. Finally they dismounted and tied up their horses. A small pine tree near at hand was rapidly felled and trimmed of its branches. Then eight of the party caught it up, and, holding it like a battering-ram, came running at the gate, their comrades, with brandished swords, following at their heels. Cormac lay at his little window, finger on trigger.

Four swinging blows of the pine log sent the rotting gate with a crash to the ground. Into the garden the pursuers came swarming. Cormac fired again, but the range was too great, and he missed. He waited a second, and as the enemy rushed for the door of the house he fired five shots in rapid succession, killing two and wounding two more. Three of these were members of the battering party, the remainder of whom now dropped their weapon and fled to the shelter of a shrubbery just out of range. The swordsmen followed their example, and for a moment Cormac was master of the field. He utilised the respite granted him to reload all his pistols; then he sat waiting for the next move of the enemy.

Presently the commander of the English party—and the only one equipped with firearms—emerged from the shrubbery with a pistol in each hand, and, taking a few steps forward, fired both of them at Cormac's window. Cormac replied once, with no more effect than his opponent; then the latter withdrew to reload. So began a curious duel, lasting some ten minutes. The Englishman repeated the process already described several times, but as he never came to close range the result was always the same. After wasting three shots Cormac desisted from the combat, hoping to tempt the Englishman nearer; but now the latter, thinking his enemy silenced, gave a rapid order, whereat his men darted forward again, and, catching up the pine log, made another dash for the door. Cormac brought down two of them on the way, but the rest pushed on and reached their objective. A resounding thud told that the ram was hard at work.

It was only a question of seconds before the door would

be down. Hastily loading two pistols Cormac rushed to the head of the stairs that descended to the hall, *Thud—thud—crack* went the ram; the riven door burst open, and his enemies came through with a yell. *Bang—bang* went his two pistols; one man screamed, another dropped, the rest came on. The English leader fired quickly and missed. Cormac backed round the corner to the narrower stairway above, and stood at bay, sword in hand. Up came the English at their leader's heels—nine men against one —but not half of them could get anywhere near him in his well-chosen position, and even these hampered each other. For fully five minutes the Irishman's sword-play held them off; then, as his blade plucked itself too slowly out of the English leader's breast, he received a cut in the left arm. In a flash he had pierced the throat of the man who inflicted it, only to get another wound from a half-parried thrust of a lance. Still valiantly defending himself he began to give ground.

But even as he did so he heard a welcome cry.

"Láimh Dearg Abu!" shouted Owen, flinging himself, sword in hand, on the enemy's rear. Conn's exclamation, as he followed hard on his heels, was less romantic, though not less heartening, but quite unprintable. The two laid about them with such fury that the surviving Englishmen, taken utterly by surprise, fled in screaming panic from the house.

The Ulstermen wasted no time in congratulations, but hastened to the copse where Marjorie awaited them. The girl's face went white when Cormac appeared before her, his wounds dripping blood. But she was all energy in a moment, and, having washed them in a little stream, bound them up with strips torn from her own clothing. As soon as possible the journey was resumed, for they were not out of danger yet. They spent that night, like the previous one, in an empty hut. If there was any further pursuit it was completely at fault. The fugitives met with no further adventure, and by the following mid-day they sighted the towers of Castle Lishin.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH TADG THE FISHERMAN CARRIES ANOTHER PASSENGER TO CORK.

The news that the three young men had made their way into Cork and carried off the niece of Sir Thomas Stafford caused a tremendous stir in the camp.

"Romantic boys!" said O'Cahan a little sourly. "Your wit and valour had been better employed in carrying off Sir Thomas himself or Sir George Carewe."

Conn MacSweeney grinned broadly to hear himself called a romantic boy. Owen meanwhile had introduced his bride to the Lady Margaret, O'Connor's wife. She was a Geraldine, daughter to the late Earl of Desmond—a small, dark-haired, vivacious woman, who welcomed Marjorie very graciously, and installed the newly-married pair in some pleasant apartments in the castle.

Cormac now asked for a private interview with O'Cahan and O'Connor, wherein he gave them an accurate report of the interview between Carewe and Lady Ellen at the inn. Their faces became very grave as the story progressed. At its conclusion O'Connor said:

"I knew it. Florence is no less of a traitor than his wife. If he were a true man he would have told us that Carewe had written to him. Well, we have a remedy. I'll go straight and cut O'Sullivan's throat." He turned to go, but O'Cahan caught his arm and detained him.

"That were mere spite, not punishment," he said.

"'Tis the meed of hostages," answered O'Connor, "when those they are pledged for fail."

"Your spleen makes you short-sighted," said O'Cahan. "Why do you think Florence has refused to join with Carewe against us? Because of this very hostage. Kill him and that constraint is gone."

"'Tis clear now," said Cormac, "why Carewe keeps his fine army so idle in Cork. This new way of fighting is easier than honourable warfare, and costs her virginal Majesty less."

"But what of Florence?" asked O'Connor impatiently. "How shall we punish him?"

"We cannot punish him," said O'Cahan. "He is too strong for us. He can put six thousand men in the field, and his country is difficult to attack. We have but a thousand men, and the earl's troops are mostly lukewarm, while the rest would think hard of calling Florence a traitor on the mere word of a single Ulsterman. We must e'en leave the man as he is, guard our plans from him, and keep a firm hold on O'Sullivan Mór. Also let us pray for the coming of the Spaniards."

A letter was immediately despatched to O'Neill, warning him against Florence, and then O'Cahan rode over to the main encampment at Loughguire to consult with the Earl of Desmond. That general had long ago abandoned all thought of offensive operations, and only maintained some twelve hundred men in the field. When O'Cahan made his report he was first obstinately incredulous, and then, by an abrupt transition, flew into a wild panic and roundly accused every chief in Munster of being in communication with the enemy. O'Cahan tried to reason with him in vain. His belief in one man's integrity shaken, nothing could induce him now to believe in anyone else's.

In the middle of this argument the door of the room burst open, and John FitzThomas, the Earl's brother, came striding in. Behind him were two soldiers, who led between them a third bound with straps.

"James," said John, without any preliminary, "this fellow here," dragging forward the prisoner, "has just tried to murder me."

"Murder you, John?" said the Earl. "Are you sure?"

"Sure!" almost shouted his brother. "Sure! . . . Zounds, Coppinger," he said, turning to one of the soldiers who held the prisoner, "tell his lordship how sure I am."

"'Twas this way, my lord," began Coppinger, but the prisoner, a cool, devil-may-care sort of rogue, cut in with:

"'Tis sure enough; and if you had not struck up my arm I would have had him."

"What made you do this dreadful thing?" asked the Earl. "What is your name?"

"John Nugent, so please you; and I beg that you will hang me without further questions."

"Why did you do it, fellow?" asked O'Cahan sharply; but Nugent remained silent.

"What does it matter?" said John FitzThomas. "Let him be hanged, and have done with it."

"No, by your leave, brother," said the Earl. "We must not do justice in this hugger-mugger fashion. Tell us the manner of the deed, I beg you."

"Faith, it needs no great skill in words to tell it," said John FitzThomas. "'Twas brief in the doing and shall be briefer in the telling. I was patrolling the road towards Kilmallock with these three men and two others, when of a sudden I heard a shout of 'Treason!' from Coppinger here; then a shot rang out, and a branch of a tree cracked above my head. I turned to see Nugent galloping down a laneway with the rest hard on his heels. That is all. They took him, and here we are. The fellow confesses his crime, which was clearly witnessed by four pairs of eyes; so what need have we of a trial?"

"Well spoken, sir," said Nugent. "Hang me quick, general, before some fool of a priest comes snivelling round for my soul."

"'Twould not accord with my conscience to dispatch you in your sins," said the Earl. "Neither will I sentence any man without trial." Then, to the soldiers: "Take him away and lock him up till we have need of him."

Nugent, in spite of his protests, was led away, and in due course was summoned before a courtmartial, tried,

and sentenced to death. The only priest in the camp was Dr. MacCraghe, who made tremendous efforts that night to bring the would-be murderer to repentance—all to no purpose. The following morning he recommenced his pious labour, nor did he relinquish it even when the obdurate criminal stood upon the gallows with the rope around his neck.

It was a chill, damp day. Neither the Earl nor his brother nor O'Cahan was present, but some half dozen other chiefs, with the bulk of the soldiers, came to witness the carrying out of the sentence. As the executioner stepped towards the prisoner the bishop cried out in desperation :

" O, will you not even now repent !"

" I repent of nothing," said Nugent, " except that I did not get the chance to spend what I was paid for the business."

At these words many of the spectators looked at one another in consternation, whereat the prisoner on the gallows laughed horribly.

" Yes," he said. " I was paid good English gold, by one who could buy any man here, for the lives of John and James FitzThomas; and for that same gold there's many another sworn to do as much. Is there forgiveness for me now, old man?"

" Yes, even now," said the bishop, and, holding aloft a crucifix, he cried : " Look upon this, the unfailing hope of sinful man, and you shall yet be saved. Even Judas Iscariot would have found mercy had he not despaired."

" Put away thy little gibbet, old man," said the prisoner. " If it had taught thee anything would I now be stuck on this one?"

The bishop turned away, and the hangman did his work.

John Nugent was dead, but his words still lived in many minds. That last significant sentence of the traitor's confession sent a shudder through every man who heard it, and each watched his neighbour with an eye of dark distrust. The whole atmosphere of Munster was soon

poisonous with suspicion, which spread itself everywhere like some foul contagious disease. Under the circumstances the Earl and O'Cahan were agreed that for the present the infidelity of Florence MacCarthy must be kept secret, for such a revelation, following immediately upon Nugent's confession, would smash at a blow the already crumbling Confederacy.

A few days later fell a still heavier stroke. Redmond Burke, a famous captain of bonnachts, having announced to his men that O'Dwyer of Coill na Manach in Ormond had deserted the cause, marched them into the territory of that chief, overcame him in battle, ravaged his lands, and slew all he met, whether men, women or children. Immediately afterwards he submitted himself to Carewe, and in reward for his services against the loyal and unfortunate O'Dwyer, received pardon for his own offences and a hearty commendation from her Majesty's ministers.

Thus day by day the atmosphere of Munster grew darker. Nobody knew whom to trust; every leader went in fear of assassination; every soldier in fear of betrayal. The weak and the lukewarm seized the excuse to withdraw from the confederacy; the strong and true found their energies paralysed. More and more frequent grew desertions to the enemy.

And as these defections went on the English armies, which hitherto had been confined to the immediate neighbourhood of their three strongholds, began to make punitive sallies against those who still adhered to the national cause. Castle after castle was taken or surrendered; town after town opened its gates to the enemy. The Earl's diminishing army made little or no opposition, and when presently Loughguire Castle, his most recent headquarters, was captured, as many were found to attribute its loss to his treachery as to his incompetence.

Matters had now reached such a pass that one day O'Cahan called his colleagues together and said: "Disaster is upon us unless we act promptly. We must track treason to his lair. At present we know not who is true nor who is false, and only in Cork can the problem be solved."

Cormac claimed the task at once, but O'Cahan said:

"No, lad. You are wanted on the battlefield. The task shall be mine. You have done a service by discovering a way into the city, and 'tis that which I will use. What is your fisherman's name?"

"Tadg Ruadh," said Cormac. "But what will you be able to do when you get there?"

"Sufficient for the day——" said O'Cahan. "Occasion shall be my guide to action. Never fear, I'll find a way into their secrets."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH SIR GEORGE CAREWE HIRES A NEW SCULLION.

On a stifling summer night a crowd of roisterers was assembled in a dingy shebeen in a back street in the City of Cork. Two candles that badly wanted snuffing illuminated the scene of revelry. In one corner of the room a party of tipsy sailors sat swilling beer, with their legs up on a table; in another some English soldiers were singing bawdy songs, each clasping the neck or waist of a slatternly tavern wench in a Bacchic embrace; at a table in the middle of the room sat three rough-looking fellows of the servant class playing dice; and in the chimney corners two aged and respectable topers nodded over their cups.

Standing with his back to the fireplace was one man who looked somewhat out of place in that gathering. He was dressed in a suit of plain black cloth, with a white ruff, and wore a dagger at his waist. He was sharp-featured, rather pale, with hard grey eyes, and a trimly pointed beard and moustache. Having finished the drink which he had ordered he strolled over to the dicers, and stood quietly watching their game.

"Fives!" cried one of them, a red-haired man with a squint, as he uncovered his throw.

The second man, taking the box in a hand that boasted only three fingers, threw sixes. The third, a fellow of the most revolting ugliness, with a wen the size of a strawberry on his nose, uttered a grunt of disgust, and threw in his turn.

"Three, by hell!" he ejaculated, and flung a heap of money across the table.

The game went on, the luck running all the time against the man with the wen. At last he threw down the box, saying: "The devil's in the dice; I'll play no more."

"What? Frighted so soon?" cried the man with the squint.

The man with the wen gave a threatening growl.

"Nay, nay!" said the three-fingered man soothingly. "Dick does but jest, so mark him not. Come, another throw. 'Tis early to say die."

"Yet I must say it," replied he with the wen. "I have no more to stake."

Hereupon the quiet spectator interposed, saying:

"Let not that hinder you. The luck has been too bad not to turn. Try your hand again, and I'll lend you the stakes."

The gambler stared at his backer in astonishment, until the latter threw a coin on the table with a convincing chink. At that he caught up the dice-box again, and, after a long shake up, made his cast.

"Sixes!" he cried in exultation, and in a minute was raking in the money. Definitely the luck had changed. In half an hour he had won back all his losses, and was beginning to draw in a little more as well, when the others declared off.

"You were right, Will," said the three-fingered man. "The devil's in the dice, and I'll play no more."

"'Tis time to be in bed, too," said the man with the squint; and before the other's slow wits had quite realised what was happening, they were outside the tavern door.

"Scurvy knaves!" ejaculated the man with the wen. "And many a good crown have they won of me in the past. . . . But you, sir," he said, turning to his benefactor. "How can I thank you for your help?"

"Very easily, my friend," said the other, sitting down beside him.

"Then command me, sir," said the man with the wen.

"If you do what I ask," said the other, "'twill out-

weigh any small benefit I have conferred on you : aye, and you shall have five pieces of gold thrown in."

The ugly man's eyes gleamed avariciously. The other looked around the room, saw that its occupants were too immersed in revelry to overhear him, and leaning towards his companion said in low tones :

" You are a servant in the house of Sir George Carewe?"

The other nodded.

" He will receive to-morrow," said the man in grey, " a letter—a letter written on blue paper, with the head of a lion on the seal."

Again the servant nodded.

" I want that letter," said the man in grey.

The other did not answer. He stared, stupefied, awe-struck. The man in grey took five pieces of gold from his purse and pressed them into the fellow's hand.

" Five more when you bring me the letter," he said.

" I'll try, sir," said the man with the wen. " I can do no more."

The following morning Sir George Carewe, Sir Thomas Stafford, and his Grace the Archbishop of Cashel sat in consultation in a room of the Lord President's house.

" I have asked you to visit me to-day, your Grace," said Carewe, "because I have received a letter from Sir Robert Cecyll that concerns you nearly."

His Grace prepared himself to listen.

" One of the principal pretences," went on Carewe, " whereby the heads of this rebellion have prevailed, both here and in Spain, has been the defence of the Catholic faith; and it is that, likewise, has made the Spaniard reciprocally more plausible with the rebel. Therefore a toleration of religion, for a time not definite, seems to be a matter warrantable by religion, and in policy of absolute necessity."

" My Lord President," said the Archbishop, before Carewe could proceed, " your words are evil. For what says the Scripture? ' The Hittite and the Jebusite, when

the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them nor show mercy unto them.' "

" 'Tis for their heavier smiting that this proposition is made," said Carewe. " Our toleration, as I have said, shall be for a time not definite. When, by its means, we have thinned and divided the rebels, and so crushed their whole abominable conspiracy, then shall we resume the fullness of our former rigours against their idolatry."

" I like it not," said Miler. " 'Tis temporising with Satan."

" Yet 'tis her Majesty's command," said Carewe, somewhat nettled by the prelate's recalcitrance. " And her Majesty is the supreme head of the Church, in which capacity it is her will that we do not punish for their religion such as profess to be her faithful subjects."

" Her Majesty's will is law," said Miler humbly.

" Your submission is timely," said Carewe. " Know then that the Act of Uniformity is suspended, and the Papists are no longer to be compelled to attend at church."

The prelate held up his hands in pious horror.

" Is this," he cried, " what you call toleration? Why, 'tis a licensing of idolatry, an invitation to blasphemy. 'Twas an ill Christian that advised her Majesty to such a course."

" 'Tis her command none the less," snapped Carewe. " And it is for you to have the same read out immediately in your churches."

" But, my Lord President," protested MacGrath, "what is to become of our revenues?"

" Ha! So that's where the shoe pinches!" laughed Carewe. " Well, your Grace, you shall have your dues and your recusancy fines once again when the rebellion is crushed. In the meantime, perhaps, our generous Sovereign may give you compensation."

Soon after this the archbishop took his departure, and Carewe turned to his secretary.

"Well, Sir Thomas," he said, "let's to business. What letters this morning?"

"First," said Sir Thomas, looking through the bundle of papers he carried, "a letter from her Majesty hoping that next time you hire a man at four hundred pounds you will get better service for it."

"Her Majesty is right," said Carewe with a grin. "Nugent was a fool. I am not sorry to hear that the rebels have hanged him. What next?"

"A letter from MacCarthy Reagh saying that he has infallible proofs of Florence's disloyalty if you would wish to hear them."

"Ask him to come to Cork," said Carewe. "And the next?"

"A letter from Florence saying that he has received a ship-load of arms from the King of Spain, which, lest they should fall into the possession of James FitzThomas, he has distributed among his own clansmen."

Carewe grinned at this item. "What else?" he asked.

"A letter from Donal MacCarthy asking for a safe conduct so that he may submit to her Majesty and seek occasion to do her some useful service."

"'Tis well he's detached from the rebels," said Carewe. "Send him a safe conduct; we may find a use for the bastard."

At this moment a servant appeared at the door.

"My lord," he said, "there is a man without asking to see you; a vile-looking and villainous churl, who says he has important matters to tell you."

"Send him away," said Carewe.

"My lord, I cannot," said the servant. "He has importuned me with prayers to admit him. He says his affair touches your lordship's person."

"Well, show him in," said Carewe.

A minute later the servant ushered in a disreputable-looking figure, dressed in rags, with a face covered with grime and a week's stubble on his chin.

"Well, fellow, what do you want?" asked Carewe.

"My lord," said this scarecrow, "there is a servant in your house that is a traitor to her most sacred Majesty."

"What?" cried Carewe.

"One who has taken bribes," went on the ragged one, "of the arch-traitor Tyrone."

"His name?" asked Carewe.

"Nay, I know not. But I could pick his face out of a thousand. Last night I overheard him in a tavern in converse with a stranger that said he wanted certain letters of yours for Tyrone, and would give five gold pieces to get them. The fellow took the pieces, and no doubt has them now on his person."

"I'll sift this matter to the bottom," said Carewe, and summoning an attendant bade him send all the servants in the house to his presence at once. The order was instantly obeyed, and in a few minutes some twenty men and women stood before their master.

"Now," said Carewe to the vagabond, "point out your man."

The repulsive creature pushed his way through the crowd, and laid a hand on the shoulder of the scullion with the wen. The latter went pale at the action, and was seized immediately by Carewe's command and led before his master's chair.

The informer repeated his story.

"'Tis a lie," said the man with the wen.

"Turn out his pockets and let us see," said Carewe.

A servant did so, and produced four gold pieces.

"I won those at dice last night," said the man, trying to brazen it out; then, to make doubly sure, he added: "Nor did I know 'twas Tyrone wanted the letter."

"Thou art a very clumsy liar," said Carewe with a laugh. "Off with him to the dungeons. I'll deal with him hereafter."

The unfortunate man was dragged away, loudly protesting his innocence. Carewe gave the other servants leave to depart, and then turned to his ragged informant.

"Thou hast acted nobly and loyally, fellow," said he. "And I think thou art entitled to these four gold pieces as a reward."

"Nay, nay, my lord," said the vagabond, shaking his

head. "Such wealth were useless to me. I would spend it all in riotous living, and then starve again as I do now. Neither need I any reward for my loyalty to her Majesty; but if your lordship wishes to help a poor fellow that would fain live, take me into your house as a scullion, I pray you, and I will serve you faithfully."

"Zounds!" cried Carewe. "I have need of a scullion now. Thy boon is granted, fellow."

Thus it was that Art O'Cahan gained an entry into the house of Sir George Carewe. The stratagem had taken some time to evolve. For many weeks he had watched the inmates of the house, studying their habits and characters, until at last he had decided upon the stupid scullion with the wen as the one most suitable for his purpose. Now he found himself established in that fellow's place, cleaning boots, washing dishes, scrubbing floors, running at everyone's beck and call. He was kept so busy at first that he had no time to carry out his real purpose and learn something of what was going on upstairs. He did not know, for instance, of the visit of MacCarthy Reagh with his budget of information against Florence, nor of the submission of the Lord of Dowalla, nor of the two visits of the Lady Ellen MacCarthy. Occasionally, however, his duties called him to the upper regions of the house, as when some newly-polished ornaments had to be brought to one of the superior servants to place in the dining or reception rooms, or a pair of shoes left in a bedroom. It was as he passed through the hall on some such errand that one day he observed the entry of Donal MacCarthy.

The dethroned chieftain was presently interviewed by Carewe, and O'Cahan hastened to apply his ear to the keyhole.

"To earn a pardon after such offences as yours," he heard Carewe say, "some very notable service must be done."

"I can do it," said Donal.

O'Cahan strained his ears, but next minute a step on the stairs drove him from his keyhole, to which he got no opportunity to return that day.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH CORMAC WONDERS, BUT DOES HIS DUTY.

The proclamation, published in the towns held by the English, that it was the Queen's gracious intention to repeal the edicts against the Catholic faith, dealt the Munster Confederacy its final blow. The Anglo-Irish, never very strong on the national issue, withdrew, almost in a body, from further participation in the conflict; the towns, where the native element was weakest, did the same; and the Earl of Desmond, once the leader of more than eight thousand men, was now left with but a few score of personal followers.

In other parts of Ireland, too, ill-fortune overtook the national cause. Leix and Offaly had been reconquered with frightful barbarity in spite of the heroic resistance of Owny O'More, who at last fell in battle. In the north O'Neill and O'Donnell were harder pressed than ever, and there too some traitors had been found to sell their country for English gold. Connaught also was being gradually overrun, and Spanish aid seemed as distant as ever.

Autumn came, and affairs in Munster grew steadily worse. Nearly every man of importance had abandoned the cause. The earl's following had dwindled to a mere handful. O'Connor's force was the only one of any size that kept the field, and he too was losing strength. Men were killed in foraging, others deserted, some hundred were disbanded by the general on suspicion of disaffection. Gradually the English garrisons became bolder and bolder in their operations. They captured the castles of the lords who still remained faithful, ravaged their crops, drove off their cattle, and left their people to starve. O'Connor was not attacked, though some of his outlying

posts were driven in or destroyed; but the Earl of Desmond's little force was repeatedly harried and driven from place to place. Once he succeeded in rallying an army of a fair size, and, in conjunction with a large detachment of O'Connor's men, took up a position to bar a projected march of Carewe from Cork to Limerick. Carewe, however, had no desire to fight an unnecessary battle; he simply postponed his march for a fortnight, by which time the Earl's unruly levies had disbanded, and then made an unopposed and triumphant march across the province. The Sugaun Earl's credit was now entirely vanished, his standard could attract no more recruits, and with a little group of desperate men he took to the hills and forests to wait for better times and the coming of the Spaniards.

Its leader thus reduced to the condition of a mere bandit, the Munster Confederacy was virtually at an end. Here and there, however, the national flag was still kept flying. The Knight of the Valley still held out in his Castle of Glan; O'Connor Kerry defied all efforts to hunt him down in his inaccessible hills; doubtless O'Driscoll and O'Sullivan Beare were also faithful, but as vassals to Florence, whom they apparently did not suspect, remained with the rest of his people in a state of armed neutrality. But all the rest of Munster was seduced or crushed.

All this time there was no word from O'Cahan, whereat Cormac became anxious for his safety. O'Connor, on the other hand, began to grow restive, and, though he said nothing definite, Cormac could see that his suspicions were aroused. At last one day he roundly declared O'Cahan a traitor. Cormac vigorously championed his friend, but O'Connor, obstinate as he was by nature, was a profitless person to argue with.

"Stranger things have happened," he said, "and better men than he have fallen away. But the worst is yet to come. To-morrow you will take a troop of fifty men to the Glen of Aherlow and arrest me that villainous traitor the Earl of Desmond."

"What!" cried Cormac in astonishment.

Treason had been so rife in Munster during the past six months that if he had been instructed to arrest any

other man he would not have evinced the slightest surprise. But the Sugaun Earl! the sweet-tempered, mild-mannered, kindly, apologetic soul; whose proper place was his own hearth with his baby on his knee; whom his rough rude soldiery loved in spite of their scorn—this man was even less fitted to be a conspirator than to be a leader of armies. Cormac would sooner have suspected O'Connor himself, and said as much.

O'Connor flashed a look of anger at him, and taking a letter from his pocket said:

"If you want proof, here it is."

Cormac took the missive and read:

To James FitzThomas, styled Earl of Desmond.

Sir,—Your last letters I have received, and am exceeding glad to see your constant resolution of return to subjection, and to leave the rebellious courses wherein you have long persevered. You may rest assured that promises shall be kept, and you shall no sooner bring Dermot O'Connor to me, alive or dead, and banish his bonnachts out of the country, but you shall have your demands satisfied, which I thank God I am able and willing to perform. Believe me, you have no better way to recover your desperate estate than by this good service which you have proferred; and therefore I cannot but commend your judgment in choosing the same to redeem your former faults; and I do rather believe the performance of it by your late action touching Loughguire, wherein your brother and yourself have well merited; and, as I promised, you shall find me so just as no creature living shall ever know that either of you did assent to the surrender of it. All your letters I have received, as also the joint letter from your brother and yourself. I pray lose no time, for delays in great actions are subject to many dangers. Now that the Queen's army is in the field, you may work your determination with most security, being ready to relieve you upon a day's warning. So praying God to assist you in this meritorious enterprise, I do leave you to His protection.

George Carewe.

Sick with disgust Cormac asked: "How did this come into your hands?"

"It was found on that English courier we captured yesterday," said O'Connor.

Cormac had nothing more to say.

Next morning he prepared to execute his unpleasant duty. His fifty men were drawn up in the courtyard of the castle ready to start on their journey, when a man was challenged by the sentries at the gate, and presently admitted. One of the sentries brought him to Cormac. It was Tadg the fisherman.

Without a word he handed a letter to Cormac, who took it and read his own name on the cover in O'Cahan's handwriting.

I have found my task a hard one, it ran. *I have learnt nothing yet except that many I suspected traitors I now know for such. Donal MacCarthy is one. Beware especially of the White Knight, of whom I have heard Carewe say that he is the most treacherous man he ever met, and surely Sir George should know. Florence MacCarthy writes frequently to Carewe, who distrusts him as deeply as we do. For the present my advice is trust* NOBODY.

Cormac hurried in and showed this letter to O'Connor, with a triumphant declaration that his friend was vindicated. O'Connor apologised handsomely for his insinuations, and, pointing to the last words of the letter, said:

"See there. We are to trust nobody. Need you hesitate about the Earl any longer?"

"He's the last I would have doubted," said Cormac; "but I can doubt no longer."

When he returned to the courtyard he again encountered Tadg, who, touching his hat, said:

"I would have a word with you in private, sir, if your honour will be so kind as to come forth from the gate with me."

Cormac complied. When they stood on the lawn outside the castle Tadg spoke again.

"This is the message of Art O'Cahan," he said. "He may have letters to send which he would have no man

know that you have received. Do you mark that grove away to the south-west, and the big twisted beech near the edge of it? Good. At the foot of it lies a large grey stone. Go to it every evening without fail when the darkness is fallen, and it may be that under it you will find a letter."

"I thank you," said Cormac. "Here's gold for your service."

Tadg shook his head.

"I do not serve for gold," he said. "Had I known who you were the time you came to carry off the lady I would have taken none either, and I would return it now, but, alas! it is spent."

"Then you work for Ireland" said Cormac.

"I do what a poor man can. Twenty years ago I fought for the Earl of Desmond."

He touched his hat again and made off across the fields towards the south. Cormac returned to his men and gave the order to advance.

Hard riding brought them to the Glen of Aherlow by mid-day. It was a wild woody spot, impassable for cavalry. The men accordingly dismounted, and, leaving the horses in charge of a picket, struggled on foot through the tangled undergrowth. After a search of two hours they were almost in despair of finding their quarry, when suddenly Cormac espied a little group of tatterdemalion figures emerging from a cave. Then he heard his name called by one who was apparently the leader. Cormac could hardly believe his ears, but it was the voice of the Earl of Desmond. Another ragged figure shouted a cheery greeting; it took a hard scrutiny for Cormac to recognise the Bishop of Cork. He did not answer the greeting, however, but ordered two of his men to arrest the Earl.

"Why, Cormac, what mean you?" cried the latter in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You know well what I mean, my lord," said Cormac sternly. "Your treasons have found you out."

The expression of the Earl's face was one of almost imbecile amazement.

"Treasons, Cormac?" he said. "What? Art thou too become a Queen's man?"

"No," said Cormac grimly. "'Tis you are the Queen's man. Seize him, fellows."

The Earl waved his hands helplessly.

"I do not understand," he cried.

He made no attempt to evade the two soldiers, but his men stepped in front of him with drawn swords, and warned Cormac's followers off. These looked to their leader for guidance. Cormac appealed to the Earl.

"My lord," he said, "do not add useless bloodshed to your other crimes. We are ten to one. To resist is useless."

"I do not know what you charge me with," wailed the Earl piteously. Then he turned to his men, and laying a gentle hand on the shoulder of one of them, "Do not throw away your lives for me, my friends," he said.

"I'm damned if I'll let you be taken," said one of them, and spat emphatically.

"Avaunt, traitors!" yelled another, and the determined band waved their swords defiantly.

"No, no, my friends," pleaded the Earl. "You distress me. I would not have your blood on my head. Desist, I pray you."

Cormac found it increasingly difficult to believe in the Earl's guilt. By earnest entreaties that wretched man finally persuaded his defenders to drop their swords. Then he gave himself up to the soldiers, and Cormac, feeling more like a criminal than an avenger of crime, gave the order for the return march. During that ride Cormac's heart smote him at sight of the meekly bewildered attitude of his prisoner. It was absurd, he told himself. How could this man, whose own life had been threatened, whose brother had been murderously attacked, deliver up to the enemy the men on whose strength his position and title depended? And yet—O'Cahan had said "Trust *nobody.*" Well, he could only obey orders, he reflected, and so cast his misgivings from him. When they reached Castle Lishin the Earl was taken forthwith and confined in the dungeon.

A few days later a curious incident occurred. Conn MacSweeney, who with a troop of horse had been sent to patrol the roads in the direction of Cork, came home in the evening with a couple of prisoners. They were young men and in sorry plight, for the hungry bonnachts who had captured them had stripped them of their clothes, leaving them nothing but the shirts in which they shivered. O'Connor went down to inspect them, and by his order they were confined in the cell next to the Earl's.

"We have taken a noble prize," said Conn, coming upon Cormac a few minutes later. "Do you know who those bold youths are?"

Cormac shook his head.

"They are the two sons of Miler MacGrath," said Conn.

At the mention of that sinister name Cormac gave a start, and suddenly a vague meaning seemed to attach itself to something he had recently observed. He went to the door of the room, and, to Conn's astonishment, opened it, looked outside, closed it again cautiously, and returned to his friend's side.

"Listen," he said in a low voice. "There is more in this than you think. I do not yet know what meaning to attach to it, but Dermot O'Connor was expecting these prisoners."

Conn laughed.

"How could that be?" he asked. "We took them by surprise in an ambush."

"Prithee speak lower," said Cormac. "I have said I do not understand it, but expect them he certainly did. I was with him in this room an hour before you arrived, and he was anxious and distraught, and ever kept his eye on the road yonder."

"But what does it mean?" asked Conn, puzzled.

"Marry, I don't know; but I know it means no good. 'Tis a feeling I have—an ill something at my heart."

"Call it rheumatism," said Conn. "I get a twinge myself at times. I think it is the Munster air."

"There's more than rheumatism in the Munster air," said Cormac.

Next moment the door opened, and O'Connor himself entered the room.

"Not a word," whispered Cormac to his friend.

O'Connor approached, and spoke in hurried tones.

"I have just been questioning those prisoners," he said, "and learn from them that an English force is marching to attack the Castle of Glan. We must hasten to its relief at once. Sergeant Joyce with fifty men will remain here. All the rest of our men will march to-morrow. 'Tis a two days' journey, and we may be away for a week, so go now and make preparations accordingly."

O'Connor went as abruptly as he had come. Conn looked at Cormac.

"For the present we must obey orders," said the latter. "But I smell evil."

Cormac had paid regular visits to the twisted beech ever since Tadg's visit, but had found nothing there. This evening he went as usual, with the same result. His spirits drooped at this disappointment, for he had hoped for some guidance from his friend in the midst of the vague suspicions that worried him. Then as he returned to the castle another question arose. What if a message of urgent importance were to come during the week he might be absent? His brain became fertile with schemes, but one after another was found flawy, and had to be rejected. He was plunged in despondency, and then all of a sudden he thought of Marjorie.

"Trust nobody," O'Cahan had said. But that was impossible, Cormac reasoned. He must trust somebody. He would obey his leader to the extent of trusting nobody else; even her husband would be kept in the dark. A mental vision of Marjorie's wondrous eyes banished all his scruples.

He went at once to Owen's apartments, where he found that amorous young man instructing his bride in the love-language of the Gael. They jumped from the chair on which they had been sitting together—the lady blushing very prettily at being so discovered—and welcomed Cormac heartily. He was invited to supper, and when Owen

went to draw wine from the cellars at the bottom of the castle he got his chance to speak.

"You are now an Irishwoman, are you not, Mistress O'Ruairc?" he asked.

"My husband's best friend may call me Marjorie," said she. "Yes, I am an Irishwoman."

"And you would serve Ireland?"

"With all my heart," said she.

"'Tis but a small service," said Cormac, and led her to the window. He pointed out the grove and the twisted beech, and told her of the stone and the expected letter. She listened without a word.

"Now," said he, "when I am away I want you to go there every evening after dark, and if there is a letter there you will take it out. Then you will write a letter to your husband, which I know you will be very glad to do, and you will enclose my letter in it. Then you will go to Sergeant Joyce and ask him to send one of his men on horseback to take it after us."

"Will he do it?"

"He could not refuse you, Marjorie."

The compliment made her shy.

"And tell nobody," said Cormac. "Nobody whatever."

"I understand," said Marjorie. "Here comes Owen."

"Not even him," said Cormac.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH SIR GEORGE CAREWE AND MILER MACGRATH SAY A FEW WORDS.

We go back some weeks in our narrative. Regular pay and good feeding had effected an enormous improvement in the appearance of the new scullion in the house of Sir George Carewe. He had become comparatively clean and tidy; he was known for a hard worker; and his intelligence was soon discovered to be above the average of those in his station. His loyalty had already earned him a high place in the esteem of his master, who, when presently reports reached him of the man's industry and good conduct, had him promoted to the upper parts of the house, and eventually to the charge of his own study, where his inability to read or write was an extra guarantee of his fidelity.

But basely the fellow betrayed the trust reposed in him. Had Carewe ever looked into his study while it was being dusted he would have been astonished to see that illiterate scullion poring over the letters and memoranda on his desk; and seldom did the President have an interview with anyone of importance without the villain's ear taking in the greater part of it through the keyhole.

Gradually O'Cahan acquired a fairly thorough knowledge as to who was true and who false in Munster, and his heart sank at the realisation, for beyond the half-dozen of whose fidelity he was already certain there were not more than two or three loyal chiefs left in the province. To give a complete list of the traitors was impossible, and so his first note to his friends was vague but sweeping.

The day after he had despatched it there came to the house of Carewe Miler MacGrath, Archbishop of Cashel. O'Cahan waited until his conversation with Carewe should be well started. Then he went up to the study door and listened in his accustomed attitude.

"She refuses to come to Cork," Carewe was saying, "so I have had to hold tryst with her at a village hard by. James FitzThomas is safely stowed, and she wants me to give her the money before she delivers him up. I told her this was impossible; that if she would deliver him up I would give her the money immediately after. But she refused."

"She mistrusts you?" suggested Miler.

"She does," admitted Carewe; "nor can I blame her. It seemed as if we had come to a deadlock until she made a new suggestion. She would deliver me the earl if I would first give her security for the money. Now I have no son, nor anyone that could be a hold over me; so, having consulted with her husband, she came another day, offering to take your two sons instead."

"Hm!" ejaculated the archbishop.

"Will you do her Majesty that service?" asked Carewe.

Miler, after a long pause, said he would.

"It can be done very easily," said Carewe. "They have but to ride along a certain road and allow themselves to fall into an ambush that will be prepared for them."

"I trust they will come to no harm," said the anxious father.

"None," said Carewe. "And in a few days' time the money will be paid, and they will be restored to you."

"Hm!" grunted the archbishop.

"You have her Majesty's word," said Carewe.

"Her Majesty has but to command me," quoth Miler.

"I thank your grace," replied Carewe.

Presently he turned to another subject:

"We have searched all Cork," he said, "for that spy of Tyrone's, and we cannot find him; but her Ladyship has told me who he is and given me his description. 'Tis a fellow called O'Cahan. . . ."

"I know him," said Miler, and related the story of their

first meeting in Dublin years ago, and their second at Kilbrittain Castle. But, before he had finished, the approach of Sir Thomas Stafford drove O'Cahan from his post.

O'Cahan retired to the kennel-like hole that served him for a sleeping-place, and began to think matters out. The earlier part of the conversation had puzzled him considerably. He had heard nothing previously of the Earl's arrest. Who, he wondered now, was "she" in whose husband's hands the unfortunate man was "stowed"? Lady Ellen had occurred to him at once, only to be dismissed when he remembered that the lady in question refused to come to Cork. But who else could it be?

The change of subject had given him his clue. Only one "Ladyship" was aware of his own journey to Cork, and that was Lady Margaret O'Connor. There could be little doubt that she and her husband had turned traitor, and at the thought of the imminent danger to his friends O'Cahan was filled with consternation. Perhaps even now fresh plots were being devised against them. It would be quite a simple matter for their treacherous leader to send them on some perfectly hopeless enterprise and so get rid of them. As for the Sugaun Earl, he was only to be saved by immediate action. So taking pen and paper O'Cahan wrote a full account of what he had heard to Cormac, and, slipping down to the quays that evening, he entrusted it to the faithful Tadg.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH THE LION'S WHELP PLAYS OFF THE FOX AGAINST THE SERPENT.

Next morning O'Connor's army was drawn up before the gate of Castle Lishin in readiness to march. Casualties, desertions and discharges had reduced its strength from fourteen hundred to barely six, and of these only seventy were cavalry; but it was a fine body of war-toughened men all the same. Cormac, coming out early, saw a thick mist lying heavy on the plain, and decided to take advantage of it by paying a last visit to the twisted beech. He hurried over at once to the spot and lifted the big grey stone. A letter lay underneath.

With eager fingers he tore it open, and read O'Cahan's account of the interviews between Carewe and Miler MacGrath. In a flash the whole deadly conspiracy was clear. The Earl was innocent. Carewe's letter was a diabolical device well worthy of that master of duplicity. With the army out of the way it only remained for Lady Margaret to hand over the prisoner to whoever came for him. Doubtless Sergeant Joyce was his leader's confederate. Many other little mysteries were also explained, amongst them Lady Margaret's frequent rides, with a single female attendant, in the direction of Cork, and O'Connor's eleventh-hour decision to carry the MacGraths with him towards Glan.

But what was to be done? Two years ago he would have answered such a question by openly denouncing O'Connor, and probably plunging a sword into his heart. But the boy who had ridden so gaily into Munster was

now a man. He recognised at once the futility of such a course. It would have answered well had the army been composed of Ulstermen, but these troops were bonnachts —men of little principle or loyalty, and that little entirely given to their general, on whom they were dependent for pay and prospects. O'Connor, too, in virtue of his extraordinary prowess and daring, was personally popular with his men; they would not believe him false, and at a word would cut down his accuser. Cormac remembered how unquestioningly they had arrested the Earl of Desmond, and was filled with horrible perplexity.

But time was flying. He must not be found absent from his post when the word was given to march. So crushing the letter into his pocket he returned to his men. Soon after the column started. As he rode at the head of his cavalry Cormac was sunk in thought, pondering many schemes. One by-problem also recurred to him frequently —how would Carewe claim his prisoner? Was Castle Lishin to be betrayed to him? The removal of the MacGraths indicated such a course. But then the English would obtain a counter-hostage in the shape of Lady Margaret; so that was unlikely. Probably a small party of the Queen's Irish soldiers, calling themselves O'Neill's men, would be sent to receive the supposed traitor. But the main problem of the release of the Earl: how was that to be solved? Cormac concentrated on it for a long time as the army moved steadily westward. At last he smiled triumphantly.

Soon afterwards, as the army passed through a village, Cormac's horse shied suddenly, and, rearing to its full height, flung its rider on to the roadway. The leading file of men dismounted at once and rushed to his assistance. As they tried to raise him he uttered a cry of pain.

"Don't!" he said. "I believe my leg is broken."

The column was halted, and in a few minutes O'Connor, Owen and Conn came riding up to find out what was the matter.

"I am bed-ridden for a month," said Cormac ruefully. "This leg is gone. Zounds, what made my horse shy like that?"

"I think 'twas that shirt, captain," said the soldier who had caught his steed, pointing to a garment flapping from a window.

"General," said Cormac, "you must fight this campaign without me."

O'Connor turned to the crowd of villagers that had assembled, and inquired whether the place contained an inn, and if there was a doctor near. No, he was told, there was no doctor, but there was a priest living in the neighbouring woods who was very skilful at healing. A lad ran off at once to fetch him. There was an inn, too, and thither the patient was carried on an improvised stretcher made of two pikes and a mantle. Then the army resumed its march.

Cormac was laid on a bed in the best room of the little inn, where half the population of the village crowded in to have a look at him. But the good landlady soon came to the protection of her guest and drove them off.

"When will the priest be here?" asked Cormac.

In a couple of hours, he was told. Then he begged for a glass of water . . .

Half an hour later the people of the inn were astounded to see the man with the broken leg come walking down into the kitchen and asking for his horse to be brought round.

"What?" cried the landlady. "Healed already? O, the mercy of God is great."

"Ah. you're not healed!" said the more sceptical man of the house. "A broken leg was never mended yet under six weeks."

"Well, this one is," said Cormac, demonstrating its soundness by stamping on the floor. "Therefore, good fellow, bring round my horse and let me settle my score."

There was no further ground for incredulity. Still marvelling, the man of the house fetched Cormac's horse from the stable, and watched him leap into the saddle.

"Glory be to God and His holy Mother!" cried the landlady. "If Father O'Felan isn't the gifted man!"

And from thenceforward that hunted priest's reputation as a healer was marvellously increased, for it was

said that he could cure people without ever coming near them.

Meanwhile Cormac cantered along the road taken by his comrades till he came to a branch pointing south-west. Down that he turned, and spurred his horse to a gallop. The good beast gathered his haunches under him and flew down the narrow track; and so began a wonderful ride. Over the plain of Moyallow they rushed like the wind; over the smooth-running Blackwater and its tributary the Glen; through fertile valleys and over rugged slopes; through pleasant lands smiling in renewed prosperity, and desolate lands ravaged by the hand of war. Mile after mile was flung behind. They sped through frightened villages where the people shut their doors at the clatter of hoofs; through the mouldering ruins of villages that once had been; through villages still smoking, with the dead lying in their streets. On, on they raced. The good brown horse was breathing hard, but he never slackened speed. Boldly he breasted the hills of Muskerry, forcing a way up the broken slopes through the withered heather and the gorse and bracken; down into the valleys and up the slopes again; then away over the plains beyond, mud-splashed, foam-flecked, reeking, sweating; horse and rider weary, breathless; a stout heart bursting in the bosoms of both.

And at last the guardian mountains of the land of MacCarthy loomed in front, and presently Cormac ran into a patrol of Florence's men guarding the passes.

"Where is MacCarthy Mór?" he demanded; and was told that the chief was at the Castle of Palice on the north shore of Lough Leane.

Another fifteen miles to go. Summoning all their reserves of energy together, horse and man pressed forward, and as evening fell Cormac sighted the waters of Lough Leane. Skirting its shore for about a mile, he arrived at last at the great castle.

He found the soldiers on guard very much on the alert and exceedingly suspicious: his plea of having an urgent message for MacCarthy did not gain him an entry until he had surrendered his weapons; and when at last he

stood before the warden at the inner door his impatience was frantic.

"I must see MacCarthy at once," he said. "I bear a message of the first importance."

"MacCarthy is at supper," said the warden.

"Lead me to him straight," commanded Cormac.

His manner was so imperious that the warden, an oldish man, obeyed him without further question.

"Here is the way," he said, leading him to a door on the left of the hall.

Cormac flung the door open and strode into the dining-hall. His appearance, booted and spurred and splashed from head to foot with mud, caused an immediate sensation amongst the assembled company; but, paying no heed to it, the young man walked right up to the dais where sat Florence, his wife, his children, and Dermot Moyle. The Lady Ellen went pale at the sight of him; the children looked at him with lively interest; Dermot Moyle rose with a friendly greeting; and Florence himself stood up with a question on his lips.

"I must see you at once, my lord," said Cormac. "Alone: it is a matter of life and death."

"Come then," said Florence, disregarding his wife's detaining hand, and led the way out of the hall. Cormac followed him to a small room upstairs, where Florence turned to him at once and said: "Now, sir."

"My lord," said Cormac, "I once did you a wrong. I now apologise for it. I thought you backward in the good cause, and to secure your fidelity I forcibly wrung a hostage from you. For that I crave your forgiveness, for I know now that my suspicions of you were unfounded. Therefore——"

"How do you know it?" interrupted Florence.

"Because letters have come into my hands, through the capture of an English courier, in which Carewe says that he fears you more than any man in Munster. Well, my lord, Dermot O'Connor still holds you false, and he swears that on Monday next he will hang O'Sullivan Mór."

Florence stood aghast, and could not utter a word. He

turned away, walked once up and down the room, and then, fixing a penetrating eye on Cormac, said:

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because I wish to save him," said Cormac simply.

"And how can he be saved?"

"I'll tell you, my lord. O'Connor has gone away with the bulk of his forces for a few days, leaving only a small ward in Castle Lishin. I will go back there straight, and do you make ready a party of horse to ride after me. I will open the gate to them, and castle and prisoner shall be yours on the instant."

While the young man spoke Florence's eyes never left his face for a moment. He stood pondering for a while; then he said:

"It shall be as you say. Come now and have supper."

Soon after midnight, his strength recruited by a meal and a good rest, Cormac, mounted on a fresh horse given him by Florence, began the return ride to Castle Lishin along with Dermot Moyle and a party of fifty cavalry. They went at an easy pace, and did not approach the castle until nearly ten o'clock in the morning. Keeping well out of sight of the watchers on the walls they took a circuit to the south, and came up close under cover of the grove of the twisted beech.

"Wait here now," said Cormac to Dermot, "until you see the gate open. Then make your best speed after me. I can handle a sword, but not against fifty men for ever."

So saying he pricked his horse forward and approached the castle. The porter and sentries recognised him at sight, and the gate was immediately swung open. Cormac heard the thunder of hoofs far behind him, and next moment all was confusion.

"Treason!" cried a voice. "Shut the gates!" And the huge form of Sergeant Joyce came rushing out from the keep.

The soldiers in the immediate vicinity stood paralysed with astonishment; but one of them, more quick-witted than the rest, ran at Cormac with a pike. Cormac parried

the stroke and jabbed the man's chest with his point. Then he leaped from his horse to do battle with Joyce, who came at him sword in hand. A bullet fired by a sentry whizzed past his ear, but, scarcely noticing it, he crossed swords with the sergeant. In another minute Dermot's men had come into action, and simultaneously Cormac ran his sword into his opponent's heart.

The few men in the courtyard, taken utterly by surprise, were quickly disarmed, but on the instant reinforcements came rushing out of the keep. Cormac's one thought now was to avoid bloodshed.

"Hold your men in," he said quickly to Dermot; then, throwing down his sword and raising one hand, he advanced towards the bonnachts.

"Halt!" he cried. "Halt one moment and hear me."

The men, who with soldierly instinct had rushed towards the fighting, knew nothing of its origin. Now faced by the urgent command of one of their officers they obeyed without hesitation.

"Men!" said Cormac, pointing to the corpse at his feet, "this Joyce was a traitor who would have handed over the castle to the English. Forward four of you and carry him away."

There is a strange compelling force that issues from the personality of a strong man. These bonnachts were in a state of utter ignorance and bewilderment. They could not guess how the officer who had marched away yesterday with the rest of their companions had so suddenly reappeared to-day with a troop of strange horsemen: they were too astonished even to try. With no idea of action in their own minds they could only follow the instinct of habit and obey this sternly confident man standing before them. Half a dozen of them stepped forward at once to execute his immediate order, and the body of Joyce was carried away to an adjacent shed. Then, after some further order, the few men who had been injured in the scuffle had their wounds attended to, the sentries returned to their posts, and the other soldiers of both parties were allowed to fraternise.

Cormac and Dermot now entered the castle. At the top of the main staircase they encountered the Lady Margaret, pale and agitated.

"What has happened?" she cried.

"Madam," said Cormac, "from this out you will consider yourself a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, madam. Your plot is discovered. Joyce is slain, and this castle is in my hands. To your room, madam, and stay there until you are sent for."

"But, my good sir——" began the lady; but Cormac sternly cut her short.

"Obey me this instant, madam," he said, "unless you would have me put you in irons."

At this moment Marjorie came running down from her room.

"O, what is the matter?" she cried.

"A little bickering, no more," said Cormac. "Marjorie, I will explain all presently. Do this for me now. Take the Lady Margaret to her room and turn the key on her. Now, Lady Margaret, begone at once or I may have to appoint you a rougher jailer."

Marjorie, with delightful nonchalance, accepted the situation, and conducted her hostess, pale and trembling, to her room. Cormac and Dermot then descended to the dungeons. The last episode had completely puzzled the latter, who begged an explanation, but Cormac asked to be excused for the present. When they reached the dungeons Cormac took the keys, which he had found on Joyce's body, and opened the door of the first cell. The Earl stood within, with his hands bound behind his back.

"O, my lord," cried Cormac, "have you been left thus all this time?" And with a knife he cut the thongs.

"No," said the Earl. "That was done but now. A big man came down here to take me for a ride, he said, and he bound me so that I should not escape. Then at the noise of fighting he thrust me back into the cell and rushed away."

"Well, now you are free," said Cormac.

"Free?" queried the Earl stupidly.

" Cormac, you *must* explain," said Dermot. " We heard the Earl had been arrested as a traitor. What means this liberation?"

" 'Tis simple," said Cormac. " O'Connor is the traitor. My Lord of Desmond was to have been delivered over to the English by the villain I slew this very day, but that we arrived in the nick of time."

Then he revealed the whole story of O'Connor's treachery and the trick he had himself played on Florence to thwart it. Dermot became alarmed at this.

" What?" he cried. " Is not O'Sullivan Mór here?"

" In the next cell," said Cormac, leading them towards it. " The Earl was my main concern, but you shall have your hostage."

He opened the ponderous and creaking door, and the Marshal of Carbery walked out.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH THE BITER IS BADLY BIT.

And now, with his main purpose accomplished, Cormac found himself only at the beginning of his difficulties. The impulse to save an innocent man had carried him along up to this, but now he began to ask himself whether the freedom of the Sugaun Earl had not been too dearly purchased by relinquishing the hold on Florence conferred by keeping his hostage. He felt bound in honour to allow O'Sullivan Mór to depart from Castle Lishin; but he told himself that he was quite at liberty to recapture him as soon as he should have quitted those precincts. The question was, how? Dermot's force was as strong as his, and on this account, as well as from his unwillingness to provoke a conflict in which many good men—and Dermot himself perhaps—might fall, he banished all thought of violence. But cudgel his brain as he might, no stratagem could he extract from it.

There was another problem before him too. What was to be done when O'Connor came back with the main army? Could he induce the garrison to hold Castle Lishin against their general? Could he get into communication with Conn and Owen, and could they win over the rest of the army? Difficult operations both, and a single false step would leave the traitor in supreme control of Munster. Poor Cormac wrestled with all these questions in grim desperation. Hardly had he begun to think he had found a solution to one, when another pushed itself intrudingly on his attention. He sat with his head in his hands, rumpling his hair; then he leapt to his feet, and

restlessly paced the room; then he went out on the roof, hoping that the fresh air would clear his brain; then back again to a further spell of hair-twisting in his room. All was fruitless.

Presently Dermot Moyle appeared before him to announce that he must leave at once. He was under strict orders from Florence, he said, to return to Kerry at the earliest possible moment. Cormac was almost glad to find his first problem thus unsatisfactorily but decisively finished with, and breathed a sigh of relief when Dermot, O'Sullivan Mór, and the men of Clan Carthy rode away. He watched his own soldiers anxiously while they did so, and was reassured to see that they were uninterested. The holding or release of a hostage was no concern of theirs.

O'Sullivan Mór off his hands, Cormac now sat down to consider the other problem afresh. Making no progress with it he at last took the Earl into consultation, but that fatuous person had no valuable suggestions to offer. His imprisonment and narrow escape from betrayal to Carewe had taken all the spirit out of him; he had become nervous and hysterical, and could do nothing more than wander about bewailing his misfortunes, marvelling at the treachery of men, and wondering when the Spaniards would come.

"If wondering would bring them," said Cormac impatiently at last, "your lordship would have an army of thousands at this minute."

The unfortunate Earl looked at him like a snubbed child and slunk away to his room, leaving Cormac to think out his problem alone.

It was soon, however, to be solved in most unexpected fashion. In the early afternoon a guard on the walls reported the approach of a body of men. The young leader rushed up at once to observe them. They were approaching from the north-west, so it could only be O'Connor's force. Slowly it emerged from the cover of the woods, and at the sight Cormac could not repress a gasp of amazement. It was a disorganised, dispirited rabble that crawled into view—the wreck of a defeated army. It

could not have numbered more than three hundred men, and of these many were without arms, and barely a dozen were mounted. Soon Cormac recognised Conn and Owen riding in front, but of O'Connor there was not a sign.

Instantly Cormac hurried down to the main gateway, where, amid the surging mob of demoralised men swarming in to their quarters, he gripped the hands of his two friends, who stared at him in amazement.

"What's this? What's become of your broken leg?" asked Owen.

"I knew he was malingering," said Conn. "A man who breaks a leg changes colour."

"But why did you do it?" asked Owen.

"Come, boy, what was the scheme?" demanded Conn.

"Keep your questions till all are safely stowed," said Cormac, noticing that some of the men were hanging around within earshot. "And you, Owen, would show more chivalry by speeding to the arms of the wife who longs for you than by asking so solicitously after a leg that was never broken."

Owen was off like an arrow, but Conn, after ordering the loiterers to their quarters in a voice of thunder, pressed his questions.

"'Twas but an episode in a tale of knavery," said Cormac. "Let it keep till Owen is ready to hear it. But how came you in this plight, Conn, and where is O'Connor? I warrant you have a tale that will put mine to shame."

"I won't say a word," said the battered warrior—his arm and his head were both bandaged—"I won't say a word till I have a few meals inside me. I have done nothing but tighten my belt these twelve hours, and there's no nourishment in that diet."

Cormac dragged him in and ordered food to be prepared at once for the famishing troops. An hour later, after Conn had despatched the greater part of a leg of mutton, two loaves of bread and a number of minor delicacies, besides a vast flood of beer, Cormac induced him to tell his story.

"After we left you," he began, and then broke off to

say: "In the devil's name, what trick were you playing with that leg of yours?"

"That you shall learn in time. Go on, I beseech you."

Conn gave a sigh, and drank some more beer.

"I'll tell you what I know," he said, "but if I understand it you may hang me. The night after we left you—I am mightily curious about that leg of yours, Cormac; but patience, I'll be brief. We lay that night in a field a few miles south of Kilmallock. Next morning, as we prepared to set forth, the outposts reported the approach of some Englishry from the city. And what think you came over O'Connor at that? I have followed our general through many a fray, and I would have staked my soul a braver man never lived. He was a seeker for blows like you, Cormac; not a plain soldier like me that takes them when they come, but is happy if he can 'scape 'em. I do believe, man, that he thirsted for blood—'twas beer to him."

The narrator was here reminded of the tankard at his elbow, and took another draught.

"Unroll, man, unroll," said Cormac impatiently. "Thou art a very Homer for tediousness."

"Well, well," said Conn heavily. "Where was I? Yes. This O'Connor, I say, was a very glutton for a fight. But how acted he now? I do believe, Cormac, there is a coward in the bottom of every man's soul, and the longer 'tis smothered the harder 'twill out. The coward leaped forth in O'Connor that day. Zounds, but his wavering did astonish me. First he ordered a retreat; then he ordered an advance; then he ordered a retreat again; then he stood with his hands to his head, and his eyes rolling like one that has the falling sickness. I think he was in twenty minds what to do: and that was unnatural in him too, for he was ever quick of decision. But before he could decide on any course the English cavalry came sweeping towards us. At that he commanded immediate retreat, and sent Owen with the horse to hold off the enemy. 'Twas like throwing a few pebbles at the ocean. The English overwhelmed them, and I know not how Owen came off scatheless. Then down they came on top of

us, who were so stupefied by order and counter-order, and so infected by the panic of our general, that we turned and fled. As for O'Connor—you'll never credit me, but on my soul 'tis true—he offered them his sword in surrender."

"You never fled, old war-dog, or you would not have seen that," said Cormac.

"On my faith I did fly, for only a fool would have stayed. But I stood a moment e'er I showed my heels. I saw the man to whom O'Connor would have surrendered cut at him with his sword; and at that his courage returned, and the fury of his soul burst forth, and he plunged into the thickest of the foe. Then I tried to carve my way to his help, and took some hurt in doing so. But long ere I could reach him I saw him go down, and so I fled after the rest. . . . And now, thou malingerer, tell me the story of that broken leg."

"Come, then," said Cormac, "and let us find Owen. 'Tis too long a story to tell twice."

Conn's flight from the scene of action left the tale of Dermot O'Connor unfinished. When the battle was over the traitor was found under a heap of slain, senseless, bleeding, but still living. His captors, recognising his rank, refrained from putting him to death, and, when by rough ministrations they had partially revived him, haled him off to their general.

The latter had dismounted from his horse, and stood on a grassy knoll in the midst of the battlefield, chatting with a couple of other officers. He looked O'Connor up and down inquiringly, then turned on his captors and said:

"What mean you by this? Did I not give order that there were to be no prisoners?"

One of the soldiers shuffled uneasily, and replied:

"I thought—I thought—this is a general, so please your lordship."

"General! Pah!" said the English commander. "Take him away."

But now O'Connor's parched throat found voice.

"I have a safe conduct from Sir George Carewe," he said.

"Oh!" said the Englishman carelessly. "What is your name?"

"I am Dermot O'Connor, a loyal subject of her Majesty, and you have interrupted me in my service to her, for which rashness you shall presently have to answer to the Lord President."

The Englishman listened to this angry outburst with amused contempt.

"You say you have a safe conduct," he remarked at the end of it. "Let me see it."

O'Connor, whose arm was released for that purpose by one of the soldiers, produced a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to the Englishman. The latter, without even looking at it, quietly tore it up and scattered the pieces to the winds. At that O'Connor, with a yell of wrath and consternation, made a furious attempt to leap at his throat. The soldiers, however, had him firmly in their grip, and in his weakened state he could do nothing. At length, voiceless and exhausted, he remained passive in their hands.

"How many men has he killed?" asked the general then.

"About a dozen, my lord," said one of the soldiers.

"Cut his head off," said the general, and turned to resume his conversation with his officers.

The berserker spirit is not the kind to face death in cold blood with equanimity, and the soul of Dermot O'Connor shuddered at the bitter prospect. Yet, vile creature as he was, he remembered in this moment of agony that he was an Irish chieftain, and strung himself up to die with befitting dignity.

They led him some distance across the field, and as they did so other soldiers that were wandering about pillaging or finishing off the wounded came up with jocular inquiries.

"We're going to cut his head off," said his captors. "Come and see the show, boys."

A couple of score had assembled by the time the executioners had fixed upon a suitable spot. The prisoner was then halted and the spectators gathered round in a circle.

"Kneel down," commanded one of the men, drawing his sword.

O'Connor obeyed without a word.

"I bet thee fourpence," said one of the spectators, "thou canst not do it at a blow."

"Sixpence!" cried another, and several more joined in, offering various sums.

"I take ye all," said the executioner, and raised his sword.

"Steady, Dick," said one man. "I have a week's pay on thy skill."

The sword whistled in the air. O'Connor fell forward, the blood spouting from his half-severed neck. With a cry of wrath the executioner darted in to finish his work.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN WHICH A LETTER COMES FROM CORK.

At the news of his betrayer's destruction the earl's spirits revived once more. From the depths of despair he rose to the very pinnacle of hopefulness. Conn urgently proposed that Munster should be abandoned as a bad case and every available man rushed to the north, where victory was essential and the battle daily growing worse; Cormac was for holding on to Castle Lishin in the hope of an early Spanish landing: but the Earl would not hear of either alternative. He spoke enthusiastically of reviving the Munster Confederacy and bringing O'Neill back to the province, and insisted on taking the field so as to put some check on the enemy's depredations. After the straits to which he had been reduced before his imprisonment, three hundred men now appeared to him as a veritable army, with which he was confident of holding his own against the forces of Carewe. Nothing that the Ulster chieftains would say could dissuade him from his purpose, and as O'Neill had left his bonnachts definitely under the Earl's command there was nothing they could do but obey.

As soon as the defeated troops were reorganised and as far as possible re-equipped, the Earl, leaving Cormac and Owen with fifty men to guard Castle Lishin, set out with Conn and the remainder of his force for the wood of Kilmore to effect a junction with his brother John, who still held out there with a few stalwarts. Some weeks went by, and but little news of his doings reached the

garrison of Castle Lishin. Once a wounded man came back with a report of some slight successes; after that they lost sight of him altogether.

The men under Cormac and Owen were a rude and mutinous crew, and less than half of them were armed. Discontent soon began to show itself unmistakably amongst them. They were all months in arrear of their pay, and refused any longer to be put off with promises. The Spanish Landing had now become a phrase in their vocabulary synonymous with Never, and a reference to it produced nothing but a jeer. Then, as winter deepened, supplies began to run short. For twenty miles around the country had been swept bare and almost depopulated as a result of the army's requisitions; and beyond that, even supposing they could forage so far, the enemy's devastations had created a wilderness. Gradually, as their privations increased, the men began to desert, first in twos and threes, then in larger bodies. At last a dozen disappeared in a night, and soon only eight men were left. If the enemy had attacked now the castle must inevitably have fallen; but sad experience had taught the English commanders to beware of Irish winters, and beyond an occasional raid for supplies no active operations were undertaken.

So week after week went by and the old year with it. Sixteen hundred and one dawned fierce and cold and wet: first came heavy rain storms; then a bitter season of sleet and hail; and finally, towards February, came frost and snow. Even for their diminished numbers supplies were now almost unprocurable, and they had to fall back on their horses for food. Still the wild weather continued. With the snow many feet deep around them the little garrison seemed cut off from the outside world, until one terrible day there came staggering towards the castle out of a howling blizzard a solitary weather-beaten figure. Slowly and wearily it approached the gate, which was hastily opened by Cormac himself. It was Conn MacSweeney in worse plight even than when he had returned from O'Connor's debacle. On the threshold he fainted.

Willing hands were quickly assembled to carry him in.

He was laid on a bed, his drenched clothes removed, stimulants administered, and at last, under Marjorie's tender and skilful care, was brought to his senses. Not until he was well rested did his nurse allow him to speak, and then his tale was a short one.

A few days before, the Earl with his army had been foraging dangerously close to Kilmallock; they had been observed by the garrison; a strong force of cavalry had been sent forth to attack them, and, taking them by surprise, had put them completely to rout. Many were slain, the rest dispersed. The Earl himself, with Doctor MacCraghe, was now in hiding in the mountains of Slewgrott. Conn had tried to persuade him to come to Castle Lishin and thence to Ulster; but the Earl, still firmly convinced that Spanish aid was at hand, had declined, so Conn had come on alone.

"As soon as this snowstorm is over," said Cormac, "we start for the north."

All were agreed. The perils of the march for so small a party were great, but to remain meant the certainty of starvation. For once fortune favoured their plans. With that night ended the worst of the winter. A thaw rapidly set in, and was followed immediately by a spell of mild weather heralding the spring. It was resolved to go at once. Only three horses remained. One was kept for Marjorie, the others were killed and salted, and all preparations made for the journey.

And then a third letter from O'Cahan was found by the twisted beech. When Cormac opened it he found that it contained an enclosure—a letter addressed to a Mr. John Annyas in London. Cormac first turned his attention to O'Cahan's message, which he read aloud to his friends as follows:

We shall have Florence to our side yet. Carewe distrusts him, and fears that when the Spaniards land he will turn rebel. Florence has played upon him even as he played upon us—keeping him off with excuses and equivocations, and refusing to send his son as a hostage on the ground of having the measles. Carewe has there-

fore despaired of winning him and has hired a man to poison him: and therein he gives us our opportunity. Only show this letter to Florence, and I make no doubt he will be ashamed of his time-serving and join the good cause. I fear I cannot stay here much longer, for yesterday I encountered Miler MacGrath, who looked hard at me as who should say "Where have I seen that face before?"

"I hope he will beware of that slimy scoundrel," said Owen anxiously.

Cormac opened the enclosure, and read as before:

To Mr. John Annyas.

I have received your letters wherein you declare your desire to redeem your past faults and offences against her Majesty by the performance of some worthy action. Believe me it shall not only achieve that redemption but also go far to establish you in her Majesty's favour and obligation if you do successfully carry out what you propose. And since you say that your main skill is in the use of poison I would have you employ that method rather than the other, for MacCarthy while he is here will be under her Majesty's protection, and to cut him off openly would be held to touch upon her honour. So commending you to God in this holy adventure I take my leave.

George Carewe.

"Oh, villainy!" cried Owen.

"What!" said Conn scornfully. "Did you expect any better?"

But Cormac had started exultantly to his feet.

"Munster is saved," he cried joyously. "I will to horse at once. Clan Carthy shall be in the field tomorrow."

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH CORMAC CRIES QUITS WITH LADY ELLEN MACCARTHY.

In a private room at his Castle of Palice sat Florence MacCarthy in deep meditation. Two opened letters lay on the writing-table before him, and it was these that formed the subject of his thoughts. The first was a brief note, which ran as follows:

Our commendations to you, MacCarthy Mór. I send shortly unto you, according to our trust of you, that you will do a stout and hopeful thing against the pagan beast, and thereupon our army is to go into Munster. I have letters from the King of Spain, with arms and money, promising an expedition in the spring. And since this cause of Munster was left to you (next under God) let no weakness or imbecility be found in you; and the time of help is near you and all the rest. From Dungannon, the sixth of February, 1601.

O'Neill.

From this document it will be inferred that O'Neill was ignorant of Florence's recent behaviour; and so he was, for the courier who bore the letter from O'Cahan that would have told him the truth had been captured in the midlands months ago by an English patrol.

The second was a longer epistle, written in English.

Although it be true that many reports of your proceedings in Munster since Tyrone came thither, do give an occasion to those who wish you ill, to number you among the ill-affected subjects, yet till it be heard from

yourself, and seen by more infallible proofs, your friends that know you cannot but retain that assured opinion which they have ever conceived of your inseparable duty towards your gracious sovereign. Methinks when I remember you, Mr. Florence, a wise and civil gentleman, I am so far from belief that you have incorporated yourself with the combination of savage traitors, as I do assure myself that the manner of your formal associating or temporising with them hath no other end than to do her Majesty service. If otherwise it be, and if you have any secret purpose and honest desires to make known, let me be informed of them, and I will impart it to her Majesty, who still laugheth at the folly of these flying bruits. Therefore I beseech that you will presently make repair unto me, and if you stand in any doubt of yourself, this our letter shall be for your safe conduct in coming and going, and for a pardon for all past offences soever. So commending you to God I take my leave.

George Carewe.

With a sigh Florence took up the first letter and read it again. Then he put it down and took up the second. Ere he was half way through it he heard a step at the door, and next moment his wife entered the room.

"Florence," she said.

"My love?" said Florence, rising from his seat.

"Why have you stolen from the company?" asked Lady Ellen. "What is it you read?"

"I think you know, my dear," said Florence.

"Not I, I do assure you."

"Ha!" said Florence, gripping her by the wrist. "Then why these frequent journeyings to Cork? What are the plottings there?"

"No plots, my lord," answered the lady. "I did but beg the Lord President to look lightly upon the faults he charges you with. Good my lord, why do you look so strangely?"

"'Tis not I that look strangely, Ellen. Why have you so avoided me of late? Why do your eyes shun me? Why do you lock me from your presence in the night?"

The lady drew herself up proudly.

"Nay, but I'll question as roundly as you," said she. "Why do you lock me from your counsel? Why do you scorn my judgment? Why do you follow courses I have begged you to abandon? Speak. You call me wife. Are not our lives one? And shall I have no share in ordering that life?"

"Ellen," said Florence, "you have too large a share. O, how vile a part have I played for your sake."

The cry was wrung from the nobler part of his manhood, fiercely and shamefully resentful of the sweet servitude of the senses. But even as his tongue thus gave rebellious testimony, his eyes fastened on the dear desire before him, and their hungry gleam told the woman that the bonds still held.

"If you have played a vile part," said she, "'tis not for my sake. Have I not always urged upon you to cease temporising and trafficking with both sides? Do I not now beg you to serve the Queen with faith and loyalty?"

"Woman," said Florence, "talk not of loyalty when your care is house and lands; and when your care is house and lands take heed where you give your loyalty."

"Why so I do," said Lady Ellen.

"Pooh!" said Florence. "Think you this war is won because Munster is overcome? Why even here in Desmond the English fear to attack me, isolated as I am. How will it be when the Spaniards come, as I have very good reason to know they soon will? You saw how the English fled without a blow when Tyrrell burst into the province. Will they stand up longer against the best soldiers in Europe?"

"Fie, fie!" said her ladyship. "You know what was the fate of the Armada. Will Philip send as great a force again? I pin my faith to her Majesty."

"And if her Majesty does win, what comfort shall we gain? She will accept MacCarthy Reagh's surrender of Carbery; the country will be made an earldom to which that villain's son will succeed; and I shall lose my patrimony and the chieftainship of the second largest clan in Munster."

"You must outdo MacCarthy Reagh in loyalty," said Lady Ellen, "and thereby earn her Majesty's favour, who has ever been a generous prince to those that serve her. From her my father had his earldom, and though she be not pleased to bestow the same wholly upon me, yet I doubt not to obtain some part thereof. But if neither of these can be gotten, yet I am not minded to go a begging neither to Ulster nor into Spain."

"My dearest love——" began Florence, making as if to take her hand; but the lady cut him short.

"Love me no loves," said she. "On my soul, I will never come to your bed until you are reconciled to her Majesty."

Florence recoiled as if stung. Lady Ellen stood firmly aloof, disdainfully desirable.

"What would you have me do?" asked Florence weakly.

"Do! I would have you do as the Lord President has often times asked you to do. Go at once and make humble submission, and explain your disobedience as you well know how."

"If he should seize me?"

"Have you not a safe conduct?"

"Ay, a dozen. So had O'Neill when he went to Dublin, and much it had availed him had not my Lord Ormond turned honest."

Lady Ellen made excuses.

"O'Neill was held to be a rebel," she said. "But you are believed innocent. What says your letter?"

She caught Carewe's espistle from him and scanned it quickly.

"Why, list," she cried in a moment. "Tis as I say. 'Your friends that know you cannot but retain their opinion of your inseparable duty.' Good my husband, I will leave you and return anon. Think upon it, and you will find my counsel wise."

He stooped to kiss her, but she evaded him, and left the room.

"Strange," mused Florence, "that desire for another creature not a whit better than myself—not so strong,

not so able, nay, not so beautiful neither, let the poets sing as they like—can so warp a man from his proper bent."

Left to himself, his mind became a chaos of irresolution that defies portrayal in words, though it will bear analysis. The dominant factors in Florence's mentality were his passion for his wife, his ambition, and his ever-present fear of returning to that prison where he had spent so large a portion of his life. As he revolved the position in his mind, now one, now another of these motives was uppermost. His passion for his wife we have seen. What was his ambition? Florence's outlook was wholly and essentially Irish, yet he was not what we now call a Nationalist; he might not be *with* his country, but he was emphatically *of* his country. Her language, her law, her customs, all were vital and ingrained in him, and this decided the bent of his aspirations. He might have been Earl of Clancarthy for the asking, but he scorned the title as arrogantly as O'Neill scorned the Earldom of Tyrone. He thirsted to be MacCarthy Mór —a title, say the English chroniclers, as honourable in his eyes as to be called Cæsar. After that he aspired to be King of Munster, as the MacCarthys had been for centuries before the invasion; and as the Kings of Munster had often made good their claims to the head kingship of the whole country, perhaps his thoughts soared in that direction eventually. But all this was quite separable from any idea of nationality. The national idea, indeed, burnt but dimly in Ireland in those days. For four hundred years there had been no Irish nation; there had been no united nation for five. If Florence could have been King of Munster—as the O'Neills were virtually Kings of Ulster—without expelling the English from the rest of the country, he would have been quite content, until a further pricking of his ambition should spur him to the higher kingship. This being his aim, with the prospect of a lifetime in prison (if no worse) from one side, or of seeing a usurper installed in his chieftaincy by the other, he had steadily avoided committing himself to either of the two contestants for the rule of the Island. For in this light he seems to have regarded the struggle. Abler

in many respects than O'Neill, he lacked that chief's breadth of view, and had no understanding of his noble concept of a war of national independence. He did not want to commit himself now; for heavily as the battle had gone against his countrymen, it was by no means lost yet. The north was still holding out manfully; Tyrrell still ranged undefeated in the midlands; those bonnachts left by O'Neill were not yet expelled from Munster; and the arrival of the Spaniards might yet change the whole complexion of the war. Were they to land, as well they might, in any of the numerous harbours in his own territory, nothing could restrain his clansmen from following them to Dublin, and with them he would be compelled to go. Everything counselled continued adherence to the old policy of neutrality, and yet . . .

Strange that desire for another creature that can so warp a man from his proper bent.

Lady Ellen returned to her husband with a look of inquiry that expected but one answer.

"I am going to Cork," he said . . . "To-morrow," he added, as he claimed the reward for his surrender.

And so it was that when Cormac arrived, tired and wet, the following evening he learned that MacCarthy Mór had gone away. Remembering previous deceptions, however, he demanded to see the Lady Ellen.

"Where is your husband?" he asked as soon as he found himself in her presence.

"He went this morning to Cork," said Lady Ellen, and there was no mistaking the note of triumph in her voice.

"Cork!" cried Cormac, and the hand of despair closed around his heart. As he stood still, paralysed with horror and disappointment, Lady Ellen uttered a mocking laugh. That jarred him instantly into activity.

"O, thou vile woman!" he cried. "Here is thy work. Look, and then hang thyself." And he thrust Carewe's letter to Annyas into her hand.

The Lady Ellen read a few lines, then when she came to the mention of poisoning she went deathly pale, and all of a sudden fainted at Cormac's feet.

As for Cormac, when he had summoned help for the lady, he went forth from the castle in grim and bitter mood. There was nothing to be gained by remaining any longer in Munster, and he was anxious to persuade the Sugaun Earl to realise the same and come away to the north. On his way back to Castle Lishin, therefore, he made a detour so as to pass through the mountains of Slewgrott. He had to sleep a night in the open; then he pushed on into that wild region, wondering the while how he was to find the fugitive in so vast an area. He was saved the search, however. As he reached the skirts of the mountain he saw a ragged figure ahead of him, plodding slowly eastward. The figure turned its head at the sound of his horse's hoofs, and made as if to run away. Cormac immediately hurried forward and overtook him. The poor creature looked up in terror, but on the instant a look of recognition came into his eyes. Yet it was not till he spoke that Cormac's enlightenment came; and indeed it was little discredit to his eyes not to be able to discern through that bushy beard and hanging mat of hair the genial features of the Bishop of Cork.

"Where is the Earl?" demanded Cormac. But instead of waiting for the good bishop to unroll his painful tale, we shall go back in our narrative and tell it ourselves.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN WHICH A JOURNEY IS ENDED.

The mountains of Slewgrott tower in craggy splendour out of a sea of forest—a fortress builded of Nature's mighty masonry, with granite bastions and many-chambered keep, and impenetrable labyrinth without. It was ever a refuge for the unfortunate. To its sheltering gorges the Firbolgs fled before the Dedannans, and the Dedannaus before the Milesians. Hither the Milesians were driven by the conquering Danes, and the Danes in their turn by the revival of the Milesians. Ever since the coming of the Normans and the English it had been a stronghold or an asylum to the native race. Here had once lain the great Earl of Desmond, and here, twenty years later, came his nephew, hunted like him by the same blood-thirsty foes. With him was one faithful companion, the good Bishop MacCraghe. All the rest of his following were scattered or dead. The hiding place they chose was a deep dark cavern many fathoms underground, more fitted to be the lair of some night-prowling beast than the habitation of men, but it had the advantage of being remote and obscure. It had been used, as the Earl knew, by his ill-fated uncle. Alas! it was known to other Geraldines too.

Once safely established there the miserable Desmond broke down and wept. The kindly Bishop put a hand on his shoulder and tried to console him, prophesying the coming of the Spaniards, the return of the northern chiefs, and harping on all the themes of which the Earl

had been so recent an exponent. But James FitzThomas was now as fatuously desperate as he had formerly been fatuously hopeful; and all his efforts were useless. Then the winter broke, with its storms and sleet and snow, and the two unfortunate men nearly perished of cold and starvation. The bad spell, however, though severe, was mercifully short; and the fine day that decided the Ulstermen to leave for home brought the fugitives out to the open air.

That day they hunted small game in the woods far below their cave, which gave them royal feasting for the time, and proved their undoing in the end. For as they staggered home laden with booty they did not see a lurking figure that followed in their track to their very lair.

Next morning dawned crisp and fair with the bright clear sunlight characteristic of winter. The Earl and the Bishop, a veritable pair of scarecrows, sat by a fire of sticks at the mouth of their cave. The Earl gnawed greedily at the leg of a boiled rabbit which he held in his fingers, while the Bishop clutched in both hands a steaming panikin of soup made from one of the same creatures. The warm blood flowing once more through his veins cheered the heart of James FitzThomas, and he spoke hopeful words to his companion.

"Be not downhearted, good your lordship. Spring is here, and the Spaniards are coming. I warrant we'll have you mitred and crosiered sitting in your see of Cork ere the summer is upon us."

"And you, James?" asked the Bishop, his eyes a-twinkle.

"If I have not an army of five thousand of those rascal Geraldines at my back in a month's time you may hang me. . . . Give me the soup a moment, I pray you."

The Bishop handed over the tin and picked up a limb instead. The Earl took a long draught of the hot soup, and smacked his lips. His spirits rose higher and higher.

"When the war is over," he said, "I will build me a castle the like of which is not in Ireland, no, nor in Spain. My wife was ever discontented with our small way of living, and clamoured much when I did not assert

my rights. And then when I received the Earldom and she hoped we would live at last in proper state, lo! I was always away from her side and with the army. . . . I wonder how she fares," he added wistfully.

Then he took another draught of the soup, with big eyes goggling over the brim of the panikin at his friend. All of a sudden he choked and put down the vessel, and coughed and coughed to clear his windpipe.

"Look—look—behind you!" he gasped at length.

The Bishop turned in the direction indicated and saw a little party of men not half a mile away climbing steadily up the hill towards them. Instantly he pulled the Earl into the cover of a bush close by, whence they took stock of the newcomers.

"Two, four, seven," counted the Bishop.

"They are armed," said the Earl.

"Let us slip back into the cave then."

"No. Let us see if they be friends.

The strangers approached nearer, until at last their features could be discerned. At that the Earl gave an exclamation of horror.

"See their leader," he said in a hoarse whisper. "'Tis my villainous brother-in-law, Edmund FitzGibbon, the White Knight. He hates me, my lord; and has always hated me, as some men hate a cat, without reason."

"Then in God's name let us back into the cave," said the Bishop.

"'Tis useless," said the Earl, down in the depths of despair at once. "'Tis plain he is on my trail, and the fire will betray our presence. But do you hide, my lord. Perchance he will be satisfied to have me, and you shall escape."

"Nay," said the Bishop. "I'll stand by you."

The two stood up to meet the hunters, who in a few minutes stood before them. There was a cold grin of triumph on the rat-like face of the White Knight, which lit up even brighter when the Earl held out his hand, saying with a weak smile:

"Welcome, Edmund. You have chosen a most fair morning to visit my poor abode."

"You shall bide poorer yet," said the Knight; then, in English, to his servants: "Now Peter: now John: seize the man at once."

"What pleasantry is this, Edmund?" asked the Earl, growing pale and shrinking back.

"No pleasantry, but grim earnest," said the Knight, "You are her Majesty's prisoner."

The men laid their hands on the Earl, who submitted unresisting. But the Bishop stepped up to the Knight with a determined air.

"Edmund FitzGibbon," he said, "do you dare lay hands on the head of your race, anointed by the rites of holy church, to hand him over to the enemies of your faith and nation?"

"This is not the head of my race," said the Knight rudely. "'Tis a vile usurper, appointed by a traitor, and a traitor himself to her sacred Majesty."

"Edmund," said the Earl, "are we not brothers, united in affection by your sister, that is dearer to me than life itself? I beseech you, if there is any wrong I have done you let me know of it that I may make amends, but do not hand me over to those that mean my death."

"Bind his hands," said the Knight to his minions, who proceeded to do so at once.

"In God's name, Edmund," pleaded the Bishop, "think what you are doing."

"I have long thought of it," said the Knight. "Tighter, Peter."

"Edmund," said the Earl, "in two months' time I will have six thousand men at my back to drive the English from the land. I pray you, brother, do not, for your spite against me, ruin the cause of your country."

"The country can do well without you, brother," answered the knight. "Good, Peter. That will suffice."

The Earl was now securely bound, and his guards, rough English soldiers who understood not a word of what had passed, began to drag him away. The Bishop laid a hand on the Knight's arm and began a fresh appeal, but the traitor thrust him rudely aside, and commanded his servants to lead off the prisoner.

"Farewell, good my lord," said the latter resignedly as he was dragged away. "What must be must be. Take heed for thyself and mind me not."

The party went rapidly down the slope, the unfortunate Earl stumbling ever and again in his shackles. The Bishop dauntlessly scrambled after them, intent on making a last appeal; but the pace was too fast, the way too rugged for his famished and aged limbs. He stopped at last, almost exhausted; then, summoning the last of his strength, he stood upon a ledge of rock, erect, rigid, his hands raised to heaven, and his white hair streaming in the wind.

"On, Edmund FitzGibbon," he cried. "Carry your brother to the slaughter-house of the butchers that have bought him. Fetch home your blood-money and gloat upon it in the night. Grasp all the happiness that your mean soul covets, for your time is short. The curse of God is upon you, Edmund FitzGibbon. Living you shall be loathed among living men, and dying you shall perish in infamy. The name of your house shall cease, and your race shall vanish from the earth. The springs of repentance and hope shall be dried up in your soul, and your heart shall wither in your last hour. The thief shall find pardon, and the adulterer shall find pardon; yea, the guilt of the murderer shall be washed away. But you shall freeze eternally in hell's centre: for there is no anger but abates except the anger of Christ with Clan Gibbon."

The Bishop's head sank exhausted on his breast and his arms dropped to his sides. A sardonic laugh echoed back among the crags.

The following day the old man was found, as we have seen, by Cormac; who set him upon his horse and brought him to Castle Lishin. There they told their melancholy story, and when it was concluded Owen said:

"Our sorrows are dried up, woe follows woe so fast. O'Cahan is dead."

"Dead?" gasped the Bishop, while Cormac stood stunned into silence.

"Tadg the fisherman came to us yesterday," said Owen,

"and told us that Art was recognised by that thrice accursed traitor, Miler MacGrath. They seized him on the quay, even as he came towards Tadg's boat, and next morning he was hanged from the city walls."

"O God!" cried the bishop. "Why is Thy hand so heavy upon this land of ours, that all who take her part are destroyed? What sin did our fathers commit that a curse is fallen upon their children?" Tears rolled down his wrinkled cheek as he spoke, but the hot emotion in the breasts of the younger men was too fierce and purposeful for such expression.

Cormac had heard the news in silence, betraying only by a twitching of the muscles of eyes and throat the feelings that burned within him. He completed the tale of disaster by relating how Florence had walked into the enemy's trap. Then he said: "We can do no more. Let us to Ulster at once."

"You will come with us, my lord, will you not?" said Owen to the bishop, but the old man shook his head.

"No, my son," he replied. "Go you and play your part upon the field of battle. My place is with my sorrowing people."

His decision was received in silence. Then Marjorie asked:

"What of the Lady Margaret?"

Cormac and Conn were for hanging her, but Owen and the bishop prevailed in favour of the doubtfully milder course of dismissing her to find her own way to the nearest English post. The traitress was immediately released and sent off. All preparations had already been made for the journey. The one horse—he that had carried Cormac on his futile mission to Florence—was saddled for Marjorie. The faithful remnant of the garrison shouldered the baggage and provisions. The three captains armed themselves to the teeth. Then all knelt upon the rough stones of the courtyard to receive the bishop's blessing.

Soon all Munster rang wth the news that the Earl of

Desmond and Florence MacCarthy had been arrested. When word of the poison plot against the latter reached Cecyll, that statesman's conscience (or whatever served him instead of one) for once revolted. He had a warm feeling for Florence, and could not bring himself to endorse his subordinate's base plan for his removal. He preferred to violate her Majesty's pledged word; and so the treacherous chieftain, for all his "pardons" and "safe conducts," had no sooner set foot in Cork than he was seized and conveyed to England, where he spent the remaining forty years of his life in a number of her Majesty's prisons.

The Sugaun Earl was confined for a time in Shandon Castle, and then transferred to the Tower of London, where he did not long survive. Dramatic in its brevity is the report of his ultimate fate: a line in the official maintenance sheet kept by the governor of that gloomy prison, recording the weekly charge for "Physicke, Sourgeon, and Watchers with him in his lunacy."

So ended the Munster Confederacy; but the Ulstermen, with hopeful and resolute hearts, turned their backs upon the province and marched away to the battlefields of the North.

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